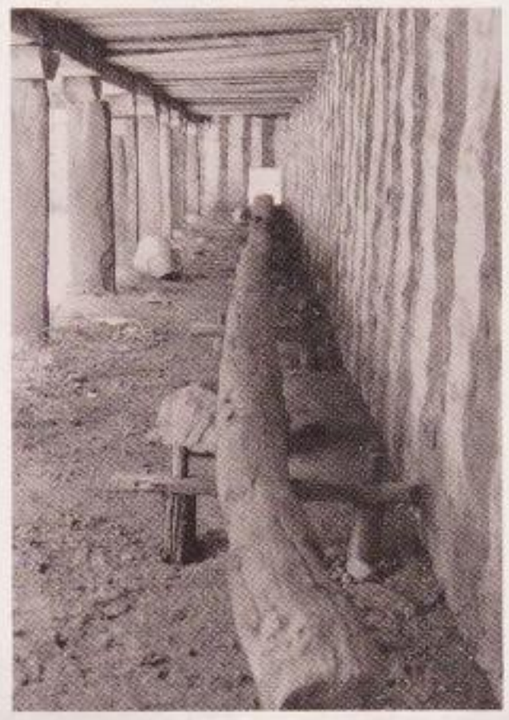
Madeleine Biardeau



Stories about

POSTS

Vedic Variations around the Hindu Goddess

Translated by Alf Hiltebeitel, Marie-Louise Reiniche, *and* James Walker

Edited by Alf Hiltebeitel *and* Marie-Louise Reiniche

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STORIES ABOUT POSTS

Vedic Variations around the Hindu Goddess

Madeleine Biardeau

Translated by Alf Hiltebeitel, Marie-Louise Reiniche,
and James Walker
Edited by Alf Hiltebeitel *and* Marie-Louise Reiniche

Stories about Posts is the magnum opus of Madeleine Biardeau, one of the most influential Indologists of the twentieth century. Nearly twenty years in the making, it connects her varied studies on the Sanskrit epics, the Hindu Goddess, Vedic sacrifice, rural India, and the interpretation of Hinduism.

After exploring several ethnographic facts that have escaped the notice of previous observers, Biardeau presents a variety of hunches, hypotheses, and insights building up to the provocative thesis of *Stories about Posts*: that the variations found in the contemporary cult of the Goddess—in both her royal and rural village aspects—reveal untraced regional histories of the Vedic sacrificial post, the *yupa*. Biardeau's work opens up new ways of thinking about Vedic sacrificial themes and elements as they recur in post-Vedic texts and iconographies. It also connects wayside stones in Maharashtra named after the buffalo to stones, posts, and people named after a so-called Buffalo King in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamilnadu.

A work of magnificent scholarship and fieldwork, *Stories about Posts,* in ways no previous work has attempted, much less accomplished, unravels much of the mystery surrounding contemporary Hindu ritual by connecting it to the ancient Sanskrit epics. As such, it will fascinate students of Indology, religious studies, and anthropology for years to come.

Stories about Posts

STORIES *about* POSTS

Vedic Variations
around the Hindu Goddess

MADELEINE BIARDEAU

Translated by
Alf Hiltebeitel, Marie-Louise Reiniche,
and James Walker

Edited by
Alf Hiltebeitel
and Marie-Louise Reiniche

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Chicago & London

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Credits for photographs:

MB = Madeleine Biardeau
AH= Alf Hiltebeitel
IFI = Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry
FL = Françoise L'Hernault
GP = Guy Poitevin
MLR = Marie-Louise Reiniche
FS = Frits Staal

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Preface

The present study deliberately takes a position outside all polemics: the facts doubtlessly never speak for themselves and perhaps, ultimately, show only what one wishes them to prove. Yet the interest of the subject resides not only in the comparison of so-called popular religion and the known corpus of Vedic facts; it is less a question of expounding a thesis, or more modestly an idea, than of following a trail abundantly marked out by ethnographic facts in order to draw a body of information from the spatial and temporal paths of Hindu thought. One may also hope that certain conclusions would have relevance extending beyond the Indian domain, although that would not be the goal.

In any case, one cannot say that this investigation was conducted in an entirely favorable state of scientific affairs. Whether one turns to those who, as though it were more a matter of basic evidence than axiom, almost mechanically oppose the great brahmanic tradition to the local, popular, and little tradition, or whether one turns to those who sift through the cults and beliefs at work in the modern great Hindu temples in search of tribal, so-called primitive contributions, the common problematic guiding them assumes at least one irreducible duality in Hinduism as observed today. It is precisely this duality that is here called into question. That is why I have chosen as the central focus of this study the links between ethnographic data and certain Vedic themes, leaving in the background the classical exploitation of the same themes. The latter will appear only in the notes, and I will assume that they are sufficiently known to allude to them while not treating them in and of themselves. If in particular I refuse to speak of the Goddess as a specifically Dravidian contribution to the structure of Hinduism, it is because that would be a matter of pure hypothesis. But also, one observes the formation of the place of the Goddess very early in the foundational texts, beginning with the *Mahābhārata*, and there is no longer reason to ascribe to her an origin other than, for example, that of Viṣṇu. In the state of our most ancient and intra-Indian information, there is no reason whatsoever to oppose the Aryan gods to the Dravidian Goddess. That does not, however, mean that Hinduism has been formed only as a religion of the *ārya,* without any "autochthonous" contribution, be it Dravidian or otherwise. Quite simply,

we do not have the means to isolate such a component. It seems, therefore, judicious to elucidate a unitary structure without assuming an origin that will remain inaccessible to us.

The ethnographic facts recorded here are to a large extent the result of direct investigations carried out mainly in the Deccan (including Orissa) and the Tamil South. The École Française d'Extrême-Orient is already aware of my gratitude for the financial assistance and the means placed at my disposal by its directors, particularly the late Jean Filliozat. But I also want to express what I owe to my colleagues, among them, the late Françoise L'Hernault, member of the EFEO, an archaeologist residing in Pondicherry. Other than the fact that a good number of my field studies were carried out in her company, she offered her spontaneous collaboration both in the form of new facts gleaned in the course of her peregrinations and bibliographic information. It is not always possible for me to take their contribution into account—so many informal discussions precipitated a sudden revelation!—but it was definitely considerable. It was also Françoise L'Hernault who, with the technical department of the EFEO, composed the plates and the line drawings.

The writing of this work extended over several years, from about 1975 to 1987, interrupted by new fieldwork that greatly enlarged the scope of the study and rectified or developed certain initial orientations. It is obvious that I at some point had to conclude the bibliographic compilation—let us say in 1983-84—and the gathering of data in the field—in 1984. The bibliography, in effect, includes only those works I read for this study and makes no pretensions of being exhaustive.

Translators' Preface

The presentation of a translation of this book for English readers has been first of all a presentation to its author by some of her appreciative colleagues, a surprise, in fact. When Madeleine Biardeau confided to Marie-Louise Reiniche that her *Stories about Posts* (*Histoires de poteaux*) was the one book she would most like to see translated into English, the editors, with Françoise L'Hernault, felt there was no better way to present her with a sign of her colleagues' appreciation than to invite them to help make such a presentation possible. Françoise L'Hernault contributed mightily to get the project under way. Unfortunately, she was not able to share in the pleasure of making the actual presentation to Madeleine. For that, the editors join the following in their felicitations: Greg Bailey, La Trobe University, Australia; James Fitzgerald, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; David Shulman, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and David White, University of California at Santa Barbara.

For English readers, the book is of course Madeleine Biardeau's presentation. We can catch something of her wish to see it in English from several angles. First, it is a project of nearly twenty years in the making that threaded itself between her other more "conventional" projects (that is, things numerous other people were also working on): studies of the Sanskrit epics, especially the *Mahābhārata*; studies of the Goddess; studies of Vedic sacrifice; and the interpretation of Hinduism. This threading began with a wholly original set of hunches, hypotheses, and insights, and carried on to the provocative and daring thesis of this book: that it is through variations found in the cult of the Goddess—in both her royal and village aspects—that one can trace "stories" (the French would also allow "histories" which, however obscure, are also traced and theorized whenever possible in this book) "about posts," and that behind their variety stands the Vedic sacrificial post or *yūpa*. Moreover, it is a project whose momentum has its lessons. On the Indological side, it has opened new ways to illumine Vedic sacrificial themes and elements as they recur in post-Vedic texts, practices, and iconographies—including the oral texts, rituals, and iconographies of popular and folk Hinduism. And on the ethnographic side, it grew from little things (poorly understood wayside stones in Maharashtra named after the buffalo) to farther and wider ones (posts, stones, and

people named after a "Buffalo King" in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamilnadu), until it had to be limited geographically by *not* writing up the findings of fieldwork done in Tulunad, which would have further demonstrated the generativity of the hypotheses, but done more than was needed to show the force and sufficiency of the argument.

For this study to be available in English is thus a presentation to English readers of a book that lies at a kind of nerve center of Madeleine Biardeau's larger work. The translation will enable some to follow up threads that lead back to other works in French, while others will at least be able to appreciate how Biardeau ties her varied projects together, and how this most original, productive, influential, and multitalented author works: in the field, with texts, as a critic and theorist of the disciplines she engages, as a writer of warmth, subtlety, and humor, and as an ever-so-shrewd detective.

Alf Hiltebeitel and Marie-Louise Reiniche

Note on the Transcription of Indian Languages

In principal, the transcription of terms follows the international rules of transcription, as much for Sanskrit as for the vernacular languages, except that in Marāṭhī I drop the short final *a*, since it is silent. When a word has a Sanskrit form and a Dravidian form, I have usually adopted the first while indicating the second once. For Tamil words, the exact transcription is given at least once, but after that I transcribe the surds and sonants in conformity with the Latin alphabet in order to stay as close as possible to the Tamil pronunciation.

For place names, given that the golden rule here must be to make possible identification and the location on maps, I have opted for the orthography adopted by the British administration, at least for districts and taluks. For villages, I have conformed as much as possible to the indigenous orthography adopted on signposts along the roads. But it is likely that errors remain, since the local orthography is itself given to variation.

As to the names of local divinities, it would be quite vain to seek out their exact orthography, since they undergo all the deformations of oral tradition without concern for normalization. Here too, the main goal is to facilitate identification, since all the names belong to a common repertoire.

A glossary at the end of the work will permit non-Indianist readers to find the meaning of technical terms.

Abbreviations

AB	Aitareya Brāhmana
ĀpŚS	Āpastambha Śrautasūtra
AS	Atharvaveda Saṃhitā
ĀśGS	Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra
DM	Devī Māhātmya
DS	Dharmasindhu
EVP	Etudes védques et pāṇinéennes (L. Renou)
HV	Harivaṃśa
IFI	Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry
KātyŚS	Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra
KeWA	Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch der Altindischen
KS	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MBh	Mahābhārata (the first numbers refer to the Citrashala Press edition, the second to the Critical Edition)
MīS	Mīmāṃsā Sūtra
MS	Manu-smṛti
NS	Nirṇayasindhu
OUP	Oxford University Press
ṚS	Ṛk Saṃhitā
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
ŚPB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SW	Sanskrit Wörterbuch de Böhtlingk-Roth
TaiB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā

Introduction

To begin with, a scattering of minor ethnographic facts, of details, where geographic, historical, and linguistic contingencies seem to hold sway: What is it that connects a little subaltern god from Āndhra and an impalement stake or firewalk? What unseen Ariadne's thread links the demon Vaṉṉi whom the Goddess slays in the Tamil country with the *ceḍil* rite—at which devotees turn in the air while suspended from a kind of mobile gallows by hooks inserted beneath the skin of their backs?[1] For the unprepared observer, such questions do not even arise.

The facts presented here did not come together until initially separate studies, focused on another topic, were concluded. It is, moreover, not immaterial for a larger understanding that the symbolically coherent whole that emerged was the by-product of investigations centered on the Goddess and carried out in different regions of south India, with their single guiding thread the essential relationship between the Goddess and the buffalo sacrifice.[2] In at least one aspect, the conclusions may well open a few perspectives on the Hindu Goddess and her relationship with the rest of Hinduism.

Recognizing the groping and piecemeal character of the actual approach, one must allow full liberty to define the method—the "path followed after"—to organize the material. Rather than reproducing the empirical sequence of discovery, I will attempt to demonstrate the force of a deliberate ordering, and to verify it by means of new facts that unexpectedly came to light. Starting from a datum known for its opaqueness, namely the "popular" Telugu god Pōtu Rāju, I analyze its apparent contingency as seen in the cult: a particular form of post is his most common plastic representation, for which a given wood constitutes the obligatory material. The ritual of the buffalo sacrifice, of which the post is an integral part, helps to bring out the meaning or, if one prefers, the message, that initially appears to be without relation to the form or the material, whereas it does appear to be directly linked to the universe of Hindu bhakti. The problem that then arises is to know if one can reduce this contingency, if one can put forward an interpretation that will reveal, in a photographic sense, the tacit link between the three aspects of the one fact. It is at this point that the approach becomes decisive.

[1]A form of votive penance most commonly referred to by its English name "hookswinging."

[2]Part of the material utilized in this monograph has already been examined from a different perspective in my "Mythe épique et hindouisme d'aujourd'hui" (1977) and "L'arbre *śamī* et le buffle sacrificiel" (1981a).

One may, of course, opt for pure chance, an inexplicable historic collusion between heterogeneous facts whose conjunction could never have taken place. The first step here consists in advancing the hypothesis—there is no question of a confirmation at this stage of the investigation—that a "logical" connection, a governing reason exists behind the formation of the whole. But how to understand this link? The problem remains undiminished, and one is dizzied by the indeterminate number of possible choices. However, recalling that one is in India, the form of the god-cum-post evokes a stylization—already a transformation in the Dumézilian or Lévi-Straussian sense of the term?—of the Vedic sacrificial post. More a fragile intuition than an hypothesis, perhaps. But would the intuition have arisen without a strong conviction that Hinduism in its totality is structured around the Vedic sacrifice?[3] It is this theoretical assumption, creating and reinforcing the initial apperception, that demanded the interpretation of the "fact" that is Pōtu Rāju. One thing is certain, the linking of Pōtu Rāju with precise Vedic themes progressively, but rapidly, leads to the emergence from an undifferentiated background of a flourish of plastic representations, myths, and ritual practices that otherwise would have remained scattered and opaque. Which is to say, the plan of the work did not spring fully armed from the mind of the author. It crystallized around a minuscule fact, little by little charged with meanings, that a single observation could not have given it. But I will not attempt to otherwise justify the choice of an interpretation based on the Veda. The progress of intelligibility from obscure facts through the links they establish among themselves, the passages they make possible from tangible form to rite or myth—are these not the best demonstration of the validity of an approach? Yet I will not forgo noting, as matters develop, the transformations that the initial terms undergo, the obscuration of the original meaning that follows among those who use it, as well as the manner in which practices officially reserved for upper castes reach the lowest castes.

The interest is twofold. Through the example, one sees the Hindu imagination at work in all its dimensions and the unanticipated ramifications of a symbol thus refracted through time, space, and social depth. However, the Indologist, for her part, sees therein above all the assertion or reinforcement of the idea of the deep unity of the immense Hindu diversity, and more particularly a passage, without break of continuity, from high to low, from extreme purity to extreme impurity in the domain of representations. Yet, bringing such a fundamental point to light, within a whole of such richness and great complexity, can lead to but one result: the appearance of problems which, although already itemized, are henceforth more clearly articulated and must one day be confronted. It will then be once again a question of the Goddess.

[3]Cf. Biardeau and Malamoud 1976. One should perhaps remember, because this does not always appear to have been understood, that if the Vedic sacrifice was able to become a veritable structuring principle of Hindu-ism, it is because it was first enriched by renunciation. Brahmanic speculation as to the rite *and* its negation produced a generalization of sacrifice and yoga which one finds in both higher aspects and in the more "popu-lar" manifestations of the religion, provided that these can be recognized through their varied transformations. There are thus no grounds for opposing renunciation to sacrifice as an organizing principle. The strictly sacrificial values had to be subordinated to those of the renouncer, but the latter, in his turn, is the one who leads the sacrifice to its conclusion, which is always self-sacrifice—*ātmayajña*—such indeed as can be encountered on the battlefield or in the forest. Cf. Heesterman 1978 and 1979.

PART ONE

Pōtu Rāju

I. The Little Brother of the Goddesses of Āndhra

Although there are gods in the Indian countryside who cannot go unnoticed in the landscape, this is certainly not the case with Pōtu Rāju. He is so inconspicuous, so unspectacular, that it is possible to attend a buffalo sacrifice without ever noticing his presence or his function. Village informants themselves would doubtless not have thought to mention him were they not asked about him. However, it is not—or it is no longer—the case that they would mention him with reticence.[1] The truth is rather that they know little about him and that only professional narrators from the Āsāḍi caste are in a position to tell his story. As to the ritual, they are probably more capable of performing it than describing it.[2]

Regardless of the conditions in which this study was conducted, the main difficulty stems above all from the very physiognomy of popular religion.[3] In its rites and myths,

[1]Contrary to what Whitehead seems to say, cited by Elmore 1925, 17.

[2]My own investigation was made, purely for reasons of convenience, in 1974 in the regions of Vijayavada and Kadappa. The villages were not chosen on the grounds of any particular criteria, but were simply visited during an improvised journey during which the car followed a roundabout route rather than recognized itineraries. I did not attend any of the solemn ceremonies described to me—which are in the process of disappearing—but was only present at sacrifices of goats or cocks, frequent on Tuesdays and Fridays in temples of goddesses. When I wished to prepare for these ramblings in the tracks of Pōtu Rāju, I was told that it would be pointless to devise a program and that I could stop in any village. Disappointed, I attributed this response from the Brahmans I had questioned to their ignorance and disdain of "popular" village practices. But their advice proved to be perfectly correct. The facts presented here thus constitute a certain sampling of a situation common over the entire coastal plain of Āndhra. However, the investigation was conceived as it moved along, and it was necessary to be content with facts that were brought together by the combined ignorance of the researcher and her chance informants. The rare fragments of myth are taken entirely from the literature on the subject, headed by Elmore 1925. It should be added that I felt that informants from Tamilnadu had a distinct superiority over those from Āndhra, notwithstanding a nearly equivalent degradation of ritual practices, as the official ban on buffalo sacrifice goes back in both cases to 1947.

[3]It will become increasingly clear that "popular" is here opposed to "learned." In the matter of religion, this means above all that it is a question of local cults, from which Brahmans are generally absent or only play a marginal, even though important, role. Even in that case, the Brahmans in question know only the rituals that fall in their province. They have, however, at least the interest for us of demonstrating that it would be difficult to base any dichotomy on the existence of a popular religion. The local/pan-Indian opposition dissolves at the level of deep structures.

in its plastic representations, it is infinitely more diversified than the learned religion because it is less codified, or—let us say it, although it prejudges the conclusion—more distant from the learned norms, even if it is inspired by them. When one undertakes to center a study on an ultimately secondary figure in this popular religion, there is the risk that appearances of multiplicity would increase and that a unity would be harder to find. One comes up against a dilemma. If one writes a monograph on the religion of a village, for example, one can scarcely go beyond a meticulous and deferential Geertzian ethnography, since the absence of comparison would rule out any larger mapping, or any discrimination between the general and the particular. Should one wish, on the contrary, to unify the diversity, one may be led to arbitrary simplification, passing over in silence aberrant cases that one would determine to be just that. This is even more the case for so ubiquitous yet protean a divinity. It is indeed here that we must place our wager: if there is meaning, one must reach at least in depth a certain unity underlying the multiplicity, for one moves within one and the same culture, and in this case in one and the same regional subculture, wherein the categories that obtain must be identical. Thus, rather than being a question of choice between the accidental and the essential, it is a matter of finding the same structure underlying the different phenomena observed. If, as will be the case, one is able to give greater importance to a particular mode of representation of Pōtu Rāju, this is not because it is of greater frequency than all the others, but precisely because it enables one to discover the principle of unity behind them.

A. Representations and Elements of Ritual

Pōtu Rāju has no sanctuary of his own but he has, without fail, a place in front of the goddess. Even, by way of exception, should he have a small shrine of his own beside a goddess's, he also stands watch before her (Chilakalapūḍi, Krishna Dt., Bandar Tk.). This blunt assertion would, however, initially appear to be misleading. First, he is not found in front of just any goddess, but only before the goddess whom villagers title *grāmadevatā,* the "(protective) divinity of the village" whose sanctuary is on the outer boundary of the village's inhabited zone (at least in theory, since sometimes a settlement is displaced or expanded without the temple being transferred to the new boundary). The grāmadevatā is also the customary beneficiary of the buffalo sacrifice. There are traditionally seven goddesses, seven sisters, who perform this function in Āndhra,[4] and Pōtu Rāju is their younger brother. It is as such that he stands before one or the other of his sisters as guardian. But Pōtu Rāju the guardian is matched by another Pōtu Rāju, apparently independent and sheltered beneath a pipal and a margosa, or only one of them, the sole remaining witness to an original pairing of these two trees. One will see, however, that this Pōtu Rāju's link to the goddess is established at the time of his sister's festival and of the sacrifice of the buffalo. Moreover, the site is not an arbitrary one: residents always describe it as the center of the village.

[4]There are, in fact, several lists of seven names that partially match.

1. Representations

His most common representation consists of a small wooden post of varying height, roughly twenty to sixty centimeters, erected in front of a sanctuary or beneath a tree. The shaft of the post is eight-sided or round up to a sort of ring that stands out in relief between two horizontal grooves (plates 1 through 4). Above the upper groove, the post ends in a sort of conical or faceted knob, depending on the form of the shaft, and more or less oblong from case to case. In Āndhra, this characteristic form can only be that of Pōtu Rāju. The post is, moreover, always hewn from the same wood, that of the śamī tree, a fact that is all the more remarkable since the śamī seems to be a very rare species in the region.[5]

If such a post is immediately identifiable, it should also be recognized that in Āndhra hardly any deity other than Pōtu Rāju is found before the door of a grāmadevatā's sanctuary. A classical Kālabhairava in that location is recognized by villagers as Pōtu Rāju (plate 5). Such is the case in Mandapāka (Krishna Dt., Tanuku Tk.) where the god stands before Ellāramma; or in Nunna (Krishna Dt., Gannavaram Tk.) on the small dirt track that leads to the sanctuary of Gaṅganamma (buried during the monsoon rains and unearthed at the time of the festival, or to satisfy the ethnographic curiosity of a visitor), where the god has four arms and holds a trident and sword in the right hands and an hourglass drum and severed human head in the left, while a dog at his side appears to be licking the head. These sculptures were probably brought from elsewhere, at least in the case of the strange and very beautiful Gaṅganamma in Nunna, whose little open-air sanctuary is by no means affluent. The villagers' instinct is sound, for Bhairava is the established Kṣetrapāla, the guardian of temples to all deities according to the āgamic literature. But the classical Bhairava is not to be found facing the deity at the door to her sanctuary; he is only there as a substitute for the "usual" form of Pōtu Rāju. However, a simple standing stone[6] can also serve the purpose, as for example at Sātulūru (Guntur Dt., Narasaraopet Tk.) before the sanctuary of Poleramma, who is herself represented by a bas-relief in stone; or again at Badvēl (Cuddapah Dt., Badvel Tk.) before another Poleramma; or even at the large Ellamma temple in Mannūru (Cuddapah Dt., Rajampet Tk.) where the erected stone is embedded in a square platform roughly one meter high. Pōtu Rāju can also have a human form, that of a warrior when the bas-relief is sufficiently distinguishable (as at Boseḍupalli [Cuddapah Dt., Cuddapah Tk.] and Maṅgalagiri [Guntur Dt., Guntur Tk.] before Poleramma), quite similar to the *vīraṉ*

[5]It was not possible in most cases for me to determine whether the posts were in fact made of śamī wood, but it was in any event more important to be able to confirm that they should be. An exact identification of the tree will not even be attempted, after having observed that across the Deccan and Tamilnadu various species are designated by the name *śamī*. That a tree as symbolically important as the śamī should be so problematical to identify and open to many substitutions leads one to consider the reliability of scholarly research formerly devoted to the celebrated soma. More reliable is the patient reconstruction undertaken by Francis Zimmermann (1987) of the manner in which plants were identified in Sanskrit dictionaries (presented April 1980 in the framework of my seminar at the École des Hautes Études). It shows the limits and takes account of the significant differences that are encountered in the field, particularly when the tree is considered more for its symbolism than for its intrinsic properties.

[6]In Āndhra, to my knowledge, one does not find the stone post that in Tamilnadu is the exact replica of the Pōtu Rāju fashioned in wood. Cf. below.

(hero) who guards the doors for Tamil goddesses. The Pōtu Rāju who is entitled to his own small shrine at Chilakalapūḍi (cf. above) is altogether royal on his beautiful bas-relief: he bears a *kirīṭa* or diadem for his headdress, holds a sword in his right hand and a severed head in the left (plate 6). He is, of course, even with his diadem, predisposed to violent acts that are required for the protection of the adjacent goddess. As a *dvārapāla,* he figures to the left of the entrance to the *garbhagṛha* of Muttiyal Amma in Uppalapādu (West Godavari Dt., Tadepalligudem Tk.), and is also anthropomorphic, bearing a dagger, whip, and a long staff. A remarkable case is that of Gaṅganamma's open-air sanctuary at Uyyūru (Krishna Dt., Gannavaram Tk.) where the goddess is an aniconic stone sheltered beneath a pipal, while during the annual festival the trunk of the pipal is itself Pōtu Rāju. Finally, standing apart from the above, there is the Makharajola (Srikakulam Dt., Sompeta Tk.) temple to Pathapatnamamma and Pālapolamma, where Pōtu Rāju is a mounted horseman (plate 7) facing the door of Pathapatnamamma's sanctuary. He has a double in the wooden post behind him that is identical to those in Āndhra, although more crudely constructed; the post generally lies on the ground and is raised when animals are sacrificed. We will meet it again when discussing information pertaining to Orissa, since it is found on the border dividing that state from Andhra Pradesh. But this post is not Pōtu Rāju; only the horseman is entitled to that name.

A review of the forms assumed by Pōtu Rāju would not be complete[7] without mentioning the mobile Pōtu Rāju that accompanies most of the festival processions, notably those concerned with the buffalo sacrifice. One finds, of course, an anthropomorphic *utsavamūrti*—processional statue—of painted wood, as at the Ellamma temple in Mannūru. But the usual form is that of a pole (of indeterminate and no doubt diverse material such as bamboo), whose elongated shape obviously resembles the wooden post. It will appear in the description of the ritual, but a remarkable detail should already be noted that was mentioned only once in the course of this research, although it seems to be of too great a significance (see below) to be unique. For the annual Gaṅganamma festival at Siddhavaṭṭam (Cuddapah Dt., Siddhavaṭṭam Tk.), Pōtu Rāju's pole is decorated with a human form incised with a knife, and is wrapped in a cloth.

2. Festivals

When a devotee makes an individual offering of a cock or goat to the goddess, he immolates it very near Pōtu Rāju, who faces the goddess. But it is during collective festivals that mobilize the entire village population that the role of the goddess's younger brother becomes clear. These festivals are of two kinds: an annual temple festival which, because it is costly, can be held at greater intervals (of two or three years); or a festival held when a public calamity strikes, such as an epidemic or a protracted drought. This latter includes both collective and individual sacrifices of cocks and goats. The most solemn festival, which culminates in the buffalo sacrifice, is more rare, and in certain

[7]Obviously, this is only a sample and the forms listed are perhaps not exhaustive. A head alone, placed beside Poleramma in her temple at Maṅgalagiri, is also called Pōtu Rāju, but the identification is doubtful since the head was certainly brought from elsewhere, while an anthropomorphic relief that appears on a stone slab at the sanctuary's entrance facing the goddess bears the same name.

regions (notably around Vijayavāḍā, but not in southern Āndhra) it has a particular name: kolupuḷu, whose plural form denotes, in fact, a multiplicity of sacrifices. In at least one case this multiplicity is clearly indicated, and one might suspect that all kolupuḷu include it, even if accounts do not explicitly report it.

Considering that all the descriptions we have collected remain incomplete (and, in particular, do not include preliminary details, for which there are grounds to think that they would resemble those seen in Tamilnadu—see below), only the most detailed accounts will be presented. In some cases, it seems that an element present in one account must also be supposed in the others; in other instances, there are variants whose differences should not be disregarded. Our focus here will be on the role of Pōtu Rāju.

a. Festival on the Third Tuesday of Śrāvaṇa 1974 at Uppalapādu[8]

The small temple of Pedda Muttiyal Amma is located on the roadside outside the settlement, but this is a day when the villagers come to make votive offerings of cocks to the goddess. The priest is an elderly woman from the Kāpu caste (a caste of landowners dominant throughout the region) who was once possessed by the goddess, but is now too old for that. The sanctuary includes, in addition to a maṇḍapa, a "holy of holies," the garbhagṛha, where Pedda Muttiyal Amma is enthroned. She is clothed in a red sari, her left leg folded while the right leg hangs down. Standing guard at the door to the garbhagṛha, to the right of the goddess, is Pōtu Rāju in a yellow dhoti, and to the left is Cinna Muttiyal Amma, Little or Younger Muttiyal Amma, as distinct from her Big (*pedda*) sister in the garbhagṛha.

Having unexpectedly arrived in the morning, I attend a cock sacrifice. The offerer holds the cock while the executioner, from the Cākala (washerman) caste, severs the head with a kind of sickle—a common sacrificial implement in all of Āndhra and Tamilnadu (where it is called *arivāḷ*)—directly over the stone used for coconut offerings to the goddess.[9] The cock's head is placed before the goddess on the square stone that constitutes the *balipīṭha* or offering stone. Around four o'clock in the afternoon, a festival is being held on the same road but this time in a small settlement a few kilometers from the temple, whose activity must in fact have drawn several villages together. I was told that the festival was a continuation of what I had unexpectedly joined in the morning. In front of a relatively affluent-looking house, a Kāpu (from the Velama landowner caste), with long loose hair and clothed in a woman's sari, represents Muttiyal Amma (Big, of course) while a Koppu Velama ("Velama with topknot") figures as Pōtu Rāju. They are supposed to embody the goddess and Pōtu Rāju respectively, I was told, but this did not appear to signify possession in the ordinary sense of the term, as will be seen. "Pōtu Rāju" vehemently harangues the members of the household, enumerating

[8]The only one to have been directly observed in this region, albeit in unfavorable conditions, since the cock sacrifice had to be cancelled due to our presence. Were we not government spies (from the central or at least provincial government, of course, one that the villagers did not know directly and feared)?

[9]The coconut—like the gourd and pumpkin—is known to be one of the ultimate substitutes for the "human sacrifice" (we shall return to this notion). It is broken in two by striking it on a stone. Usually the two pieces are opposed as head and body, but one can also see them as husband and wife. The cock sacrifice generally requires no fixed site (see below).

Muttiyal Amma's desires. The housewife listens with a smile as her husband attempts to check the flow of demands, which he finds excessive. During this time "Muttiyal Amma" is silently seated in a chair (perhaps the only one in the house, a kind of throne in this context). A Cākala (washerman), who is probably the executioner of the morning, is possessed by the goddess. The scene then ends with the sprinkling of "Muttiyal Amma's" feet with water from a pot brought by the housewife. Then "Muttiyal Amma," "Pōtu Rāju," and some Āsāḍis (low-caste choristers) begin to dance while Mādigas (leather workers) play drums. In this dance, a man carries a long pole decorated with margosa leaves and wrapped at its end with a white cloth. This pole, I was told, *is* Pōtu Rāju, but the person representing him could not bear it himself as long as the god dwelt within him (Does this pertain to the Koppu Velama or the Cākala? Or to both of them?). Soon the entire group moves on—with the pole—in procession to another house. The circuit is completed in the evening at the temple where the received offerings are distributed. The last pūjā to the goddess is then to be accompanied by another cock sacrifice. All the actors in this procession are professionals and the ceremony is repeated every Tuesday of Śrāvaṇa, the day consecrated to the Goddess. This particular form of ceremony appears to be customary in the region.

b. Gaṅganamma Festival in Nunna

A destitute sanctuary without a roof is located on the village boundary, a permanent enclosure that has either been left unfinished or allowed to fall into ruin. The goddess, in bas-relief on stone, is reminiscent in her stylized form of a *śrīvatsa,* notably as found on the oldest panels of the Eastern Cāḷukyas,[10] apart from the fact that she has four arms and bears the trident and hourglass drum (plate 9). In front of her, or rather on the small sloping dirt track by which one reaches her sanctuary, one finds the Pōtu Rāju-Kālabhairava mentioned above that must be unearthed for each festival. The festival is not celebrated unless there is a calamity in the village (although it was formerly held annually). The entire village participates, but the cocks and goats brought in sacrifice are individual offerings. Once the sacrifice has been made in front of the temple, the main part of the ceremony consists of a procession around the village. Pōtu Rāju, in the form of a pole decorated with margosa branches and carried by a Yādava (shepherd), washerman, or potter, leads the procession. The bearer dances while carrying the pole before the chariot of the goddess, who follows just behind him. The goddess, moreover, is represented only by a raised nimbus called *prabhā*. Mādigas play drums and the goddess possesses a woman from the Mutrāsa caste (herb and wild honey gatherers). Each house before which the procession passes offers a coconut, rice, etc., and a pot of water decorated with margosa that one pours over "Pōtu Rāju's" feet: the dancer with the pole is indeed considered to be possessed by Pōtu Rāju. To explain this long excur-

[10]That is, the Cāḷukyas who extended their sovereignty into Āndhra. Cf. in particular the panel published by C. Sivaramamurti (1962), pl. Ia, on which the śrīvatsa is sculpted above a Mahiṣāsuramardinī. Gaṅganamma would represent quite well a combination of the two (in Āndhra Gaṅganamma, or Gaṅgamma, is evidently not the river Gaṅgā but the ocean that the river joins). The śrīvatsa ("beloved of Śrī," or "of whom Śrī is the beloved") is the sign Viṣṇu bears on his chest, symbol of his spouse. It ends up having a human form whose four members are four spirals.

sion around the inhabited zone, it is said that Pōtu Rāju is a "wanderer." When the procession ends, the pole is returned to a place near the Pōtu Rāju of the temple of the principal local grāmadevatās (see below), and is in fact kept inside this permanent structure where it is sheltered. We will come to this temple again in connection with the buffalo sacrifice.[11]

What is the link between the goddess festivals and the buffalo sacrifice? Is the distinction itself fundamental? The actual state of the cult is too degraded to provide a response, but the festival that concludes with the buffalo sacrifice (without, it would appear, ever coinciding with Navarātri) is so costly that, even without the official ban, it would have had to become rare in the villages, or at least give way to substitutes. But what is striking is that the passage from one type of festival to the other can be all the more easily made, as the same divine figures, same human actors, and same fundamental rites (animal sacrifices, processions, scenes of possession) are required. Nowhere in the course of this inquiry did I discover the memory of a very recent buffalo sacrifice and, given the usual haziness of popular memory, the dates cited for the last such celebrations are subject to caution. But everywhere the ceremony itself leaves vivid recollections.

c. Buffalo Sacrifice in Nunna

Here, the two types of festivals remain very distinct, since the festival of the temple of the four sisters Madirāvamma, Mahālakṣmamma, Āṅkamma, and Poleramma (plate 10) ought to take place every other year, whereas the buffalo sacrifice is only celebrated every twelfth year, as some say, or in case of public calamity, according to others.

Nunna is one of the places where a village's center/boundary opposition is very clear. Corresponding to the Pōtu Rāju at the four sisters' temple is another one located at the village center beneath a pipal and margosa (this is what the people say, but in fact there is only a pipal) on the side of the road (plates 1, 3). Once it has been decided to hold the festival, all villagers participate in the costs except Brahmans, of whom nothing is asked. The celebrations last eleven days, and on the last a buffalo is sacrificed, as well as an indeterminate number of goats and cocks (which could be individual offerings?). On the day of the sacrifice, the buffalo is taken to the temple of the four sisters and made to go around it thrice, including Pōtu Rāju within these *pradakṣiṇā*s (circumambulations keeping the object of reverence to one's right). As a wooden post, this Pōtu Rāju at the temple has been decorated with a bouquet of margosa since the beginning of the festival. The animal is then led to the Pōtu Rāju at the village center, where temporary

[11]Even when it is a permanent structure, a grāmadevatā temple oriented toward the east at a village's boundary always has an insignificant and rustic appearance, even though the collectivity generally includes affluent landowners who could assure for themselves a good rebirth or a prolonged celestial sojourn by making appropriate donations. But it is the collectivity that contributes, and not individuals according to their incomes. There may be in this poverty of temples to village tutelary deities an unspoken rule that eludes us. For example, on the Orissa side of the northern border of Āndhra, the contrast is striking between the royal palace of Parlakimedi, still occupied and apparently well maintained, and the boundary temple dedicated to Mallikeśvarī, the *gajapati*'s *kuladevatā*. The king comes to the latter for Durgāpūjā, but the temple has nothing spectacular about it, nor anything that would attract devotees. The daily worship conducted there has been reduced to a bare minimum and the inhabitants no doubt go elsewhere to perform their devotions.

clay images of the four sisters have been placed beforehand, along with images of Gaṅganamma and Māriyamma. A pūjā is performed by the respective priests of the goddesses (a Mutrāsa woman for the four sisters, a Golla or Yādava for Gaṅganamma). The buffalo is sacrificed beside Pōtu Rāju but is offered to the goddesses. The victim's head, severed with a single stroke by the Mādiga executioner, is placed in front of them. The right foreleg is also severed and put in its mouth; fat is extracted from its body and put on the eyes of the severed head, upon which a small oil lamp is placed. Cocks and goats are also sacrificed, but by a Cākala executioner. The crowd disperses after the sacrifices have been made and the Mādigas of the locality share and consume the entire buffalo. The last buffalo sacrifice was said (in 1974) to have been celebrated seven or eight years back.

d. Kolupuḷu at Agiripalli (Krishna Dt., Nuzividu Tk.)

Here again we encounter a Pōtu Rāju on the roadside, sheltered beneath a pipal and margosa in the center of the settlement, to which corresponds a Gaṅganamma situated outside the area and represented by an aniconic stone. She is not attended by another Pōtu Rāju. The goddess's festival is not regularly celebrated, but only at times of calamity such as epidemics among men or cattle, etc., when goats and cocks are then sacrificed before her. The kolupuḷu, on the other hand, take place every tenth year and include a buffalo as well as goats and cocks. The sole buffalo is the most important victim, and bears two names: *grāma-dunna,* the "village plough-buffalo," *dunna* signifying "one who ploughs"; and *dunna-pōtu,* wherein *pōtu* signifies not only "male" but more specifically in Telugu "male buffalo." The buffalo chosen for the sacrifice is a *dunna-potu,* a male plough-buffalo, that is to say, a large buffalo, let us say "a fatted one," although in reality it is often a small and very young one, and thus less costly and easier to behead with a single stroke.[12]

At the time of the kolupuḷu, clay images of Gaṅganamma, Poleramma, Āṅkālamma, Madirāvamma, and Mahālakṣmamma are made and placed near Pōtu Rāju beneath his pipal and margosa. It is here that, on the final day of the festival, following a pūjā, the buffalo is slain at midnight by a Mādiga executioner, without having first been taken to the Gaṅganamma temple. After the right foreleg has been put in its mouth, the head is shown to the goddesses. Goat and cock sacrifices made along with the buffalo sacrifice are offered by Yādavas, Kāpus, Gauḍas (cultivators and breeders), Maṅgalus (barbers), and Cākalas: in short, by "all the Śūdras." Probably each offerer slays the animal he has brought. Then there is a procession around the village in which the Mādiga executioner, bearing the buffalo's head in a basket, is accompanied by the entire population. Scenes of possession occur along the way. As the procession comes to an end, the clay images of the goddesses are cast outside the village. There is no mobile representation of Pōtu Rāju, who therefore does not directly participate in the procession.

[12]See B. E. Tapper 1979, 15, to whom I owe this information, while distancing myself somewhat from his interpretation, although he certainly knows more Telugu than I while relying on the *Telugu Dictionary* of Galletti (OUP 1935). It is true that *pōtu* (Tamil: *pōttu*) signifies "male" in Dravidian, but in Telugu, and only in Telugu, it also more specifically signifies "male buffalo." Cf. Brown 1966, 728.

Agiripalli has a well-known Narasiṃha temple that is a regional pilgrimage center. Villagers make no connection between Gaṅganamma and her sisters on the one hand, and Narasiṃha on the other. They observed that when Cakraperumāḷ (Narasiṃha's utsavamūrti) goes out in procession in the village, he remains within it; his route forms a quadrilateral clearly demarcated at the four corners by maṇḍapas where the statue halts. One can see something of them from the point where Pōtu Rāju is sheltered beneath his trees, but he is not the least bit involved in this celebration. Narasiṃha protects the world while the goddess protects only the village: she is, in the very terms of these impeccable barefoot theologians, an *upadeva,* a subordinate deity in relation to the great god Narasiṃha. However, a certain contradiction cannot be avoided: the village—which is numerically large—also has a temple to Kanakadurgamma (Kanakadurgā is the royal goddess of Vijayavāḍā). The latter is Narasiṃha's sister—another incontestable theological truth—but she is at the same time the eldest sister of the seven village goddesses of Āndhra who, however, have no recognized kinship tie with Narasiṃha. Kanakadurgamma does not take part in the buffalo sacrifice.

e. The Poleramma Festival in Maṅgalagiri

Here, the annual festival—*jātra* (Skt. *yātrā*)—is identified with the kolupuḷu. Eighty percent of Maṅgalagiri's population is comprised of weavers (Padma Sāle) and the festival funds are collected among them. The small Poleramma temple, installed beneath a pipal, today appears to be in the middle of the weavers' quarter, but it was probably not always so. The festival takes place each Sunday and Thursday of Śrāvaṇa (July-August). Formerly goats, cocks, and buffalo were sacrificed; today the sacrifice is limited to coconuts and pumpkins. These sacrifices took place in front of the temple to the goddess, where Pōtu Rāju is represented by an anthropomorphic relief at the bottom of an upright stone. It is still recalled that the buffalo was slain by a Mādiga and the goats and cocks by a Cākala (washerman). Maṅgalagiri also has a large Narasiṃha temple that is a regional pilgrimage center. The Padma Sāles participate in his festival, performing pradakṣiṇā of the mountain, etc., but they do not confuse matters: for the village, one calls upon the goddess. If an epidemic should erupt outside the festival period, one never addresses Narasiṃha or his wife Rājyalakṣmī—whose omnipotence is recognized—but rather Poleramma, the only adept in such circumstances. As proof thereof, allusion is made to the processions taken out during the festivals: for Narasiṃha, the route passes the Main Bazaar, in the heart of the agglomeration, whereas Poleramma's procession traverses a circuit outside the village, also beside a bazaar. Poleramma (in the form of a clay pot filled with diluted yogurt and decorated with margosa) visits in passing the shrines of her sisters Āṅkamma and Nāgaramma, who have no festivals of their own: the tendency seems general to a multiplication of the grāmadevatās, no doubt in order to approach the ideal number of seven. This multiplicity, however, cannot be explained by an allotment among castes, since in this particular case the three temples belong to the weavers, although they are probably from different quarters.

One notes for the second time that the more encompassing route of the local goddess, when compared with the more limited trajectory of the god, does not preclude the assertion that the power of the god extends to the entire universe, whereas that of the goddess

is restricted to the village. The quadrilateral formed by the "Car Street" (see below) is implicitly recognized as the symbol of a universal sovereignty that radiates into the four cardinal directions.

f. The Kolupuḷu of Sātulūru

In this large village effectively comprised of a single caste, there is no annual jātra, but only kolupuḷu. The latter were held some fifteen years ago and cost at that time 30,000 rupees, making it understandable that the decision to perform the festival is taken only in the case of a public calamity. The population includes approximately 4,000 Kammas (agriculturists) and three households of Yādavas (herders) who provide the three priests of the small sanctuaries of Poleramma, Inukonda, and Orankamma. The latter two goddesses are represented by aniconic stones and the former by a bas-relief. The preeminence of Poleramma is also marked by the presence of Pōtu Rāju in the form of an upright stone with a smooth surface. The three sanctuaries are aligned on the settlement's boundary.

Despite the distance in time from the last great sacrifice, this is the only place where it was indicated that the kolupuḷu of Poleramma and her sisters are mandatorily preceded by another, the *śaktikolupu,* thereby accounting for the plural form in which the word is usually given. At two different (though not specified) locations in the fields, a small hut is constructed that becomes the dwelling of *śaktis* who are normally deprived of representation and sanctuary: one śakti named Eramāri (Red Māri), the other called Nallamāri (Black Māri). During the night, a goat is sacrificed, its blood is mixed with cooked rice and, early in the morning, the rice is strewn throughout the village. One then returns to the two huts and a buffalo is slain before each of them. Each head, with the animal's right foreleg in its mouth, is carried by a Mādiga to the boundary of the cultivated fields of the village in the east, where they are left. This śaktikolupu is supposed to expel the śakti from the village.[13] Only then can the goddesses' kolupu take place, which is above all that of Poleramma. It would not be surprising if kolupuḷu were to usually comprise both this group of sacrifices to the śaktis, who are expelled, and the one to the local protective goddesses.

The festival lasts three days. On the first, two oxcarts slowly proceed around the village; on the second, the women prepare pongal (sweetened milk rice) beside the temple. All of the villagers bring vegetarian offerings on the third day: sweetened and spicy water, cardamom, lemons, etc. The drummers (having come from another village) play in front of the temple and one and the same person is traditionally possessed. Only at night, after half past ten, do the buffalo sacrifices take place. Although all the

[13]Regarding the distinction goddess/śakti, cf. O. Herrenschmidt 1978, 115-33. I do not know how the buffalo offered to the śaktis were slain in the present case (although their heads were indeed severed in the rite that followed), but I can say that the buffalo of the goddesses are normally beheaded with a single stroke, a matter emphasized by the villagers, because, beginning with a certain size of buffalo, it becomes a real feat. It seems, on the other hand, that the first goat sacrificed would have had its throat cut and been bled, since its blood is collected and mixed with rice. Regarding this point, cf. Whitehead 1921, 50. But the distinction made by Herrenschmidt between the śakti whom one removes and the goddess whom one propitiates is here very clearly and spontaneously attested by the informants. In other words, the goddess of some may be the śakti of others, and vice versa.

Kammas contribute to the festival's expenses, the first buffalo offered to Poleramma will mandatorily be taken by the hereditary head of the village, a wealthy and influential man, from his own herd. He alone represents the sacrifice of the collectivity. Other buffalo are only individual votive offerings. Two days prior to the sacrifice (thus probably on the first day of the festival), the main buffalo is led in procession around the village. Behind it are a Poleramma and her two sisters made of turmeric paste, that is, temporary images, as well as a Mahālakṣmamma fashioned of wood. Visits are made in passing to the temples of Reddiperantalamma (a woman deified after her death) and Mahālakṣmamma. The Mādiga executioner decapitates the buffalo behind Pōtu Rāju and facing Poleramma. The body is left through the night on a nearby black stone, while the head is shown to Poleramma from outside her sanctuary. Early in the morning the Mādigas take away the entire body and share it among themselves.

g. The Triennial Jātra of Boseḍupallu

In Cuddapah District, the term *kolupu*(*-ḷu*) is apparently no longer known. Yet every three years a jātra is celebrated in front of Poleramma. Here as in Agiripalli, the goddess's temple—situated outside the settlement in the fields to the south—has no representation of Pōtu Rāju. He is sheltered beneath a margosa within the village in a small stone structure where he is represented by a very crude anthropomorphic bas-relief with two aniconic stones at his side. He looks to the west and therefore faces the goddess who looks east.

The status of the Poleramma temple is ambiguous. In this village comprised of some thirty households, there are approximately two hundred Kāpus among three hundred inhabitants. A wealthy Kāpu—who has Poleramma for his kuladevatā—claims to be the temple's owner and assumes the jātra's expenses, including the purchase of the buffalo. The temple has no regular priest. Formerly, Poleramma received three acres of land from a Muslim nawab for the maintenance of her cult, which clearly indicates that she is the village's protective deity. This also accounts for the regularity of the festival, to which all the village's castes are invited.

The festival takes place in Caitra (March-April), just after the first day of the year, which in fact corresponds to the spring Navarātri. But it lasts only three days. In fact, the Kāpu owner who described the festival reduces it to two days, the first being when pongal is offered to Poleramma (see above). One could suppose that the first day is occupied by the ritual intended to expel the śaktis, but matters are presented differently. The buffalo sacrifice takes place on the final day, at about ten in the morning. The animal is bathed and decorated with garlands, after which it makes three pradakṣiṇās of the Poleramma temple. The Kāpu owner, who presides over the festival, waits in front of the temple, while a Mādiga, possessed by the goddess and bearing a bouquet of margosa and the sacrificial knife, leads the buffalo. Prior to the sacrifice, a Cākala has immolated a cock for Pōtu Rāju in front of his little shrine. It is also he who slays the buffalo. Once the head has been severed, the animal's right foreleg is placed across its mouth, its eyes are closed with fat taken from its body, and it is left in front of the goddess, outside the entrance to her sanctuary, until evening. The possessed Mādiga quickly removes the body, and in the evening he will take away the head. Everything is shared among the local Mādigas. The Cākala executioner receives a wage of one rupee, five measures of rice, and three yards of cloth.

There is, however, a prehistory to the festival: probably it has to do with the first day that appears to have been omitted at the festival's beginning. Within the village, to the north, a cult is addressed to Gaṅgamma, who has neither sanctuary nor representation. The rite is celebrated in the middle of the road where she is "represented" by placing turmeric and vermilion on the ground. Pongal and a goat are offered to her. The goat is also slain by the Cākala. From there, one proceeds to Pōtu Rāju to offer cooked rice taken from what was intended for Gaṅgamma (before being offered to her). It is at this time that the cock is sacrificed to the same Pōtu Rāju so as to then proceed to the Poleramma temple, where the pongal took place that was mentioned in connection with the beginning.

At no time does anyone pronounce the word *śakti*. Moreover, everyone knows Gaṅgamma as one of the seven sisters. She is even considered here as Poleramma's elder sister. But her association with the festival of her younger sister makes her play a role very similar to that of the śaktis in Sātulūru—with neither image nor temple, with the immolation of a goat, and again preceding Poleramma's worship. The link between the two is formed by Pōtu Rāju, who will then play his role of the goddess's guardian. Would he not be the guarantor that the śakti Gaṅgamma (goddess of a neighboring and hostile village?) is held at a distance and that one has nothing more to fear from her?

h. The Festival of the Goddesses at Badvēl

There are three Satyammas in Badvēl. One, located in the north of the settlement (which is multicaste and numerically large), is named Pedda-Satyamma; one in the west is called Kōṭṭa-Satyamma, although there is no fort (*kōṭṭa*); and a third is in the Poleramma temple, which is also located in the west. Poleramma is the most important grāmadevatā, who receives the buffalo sacrifice, while the others must be content with goats and cocks. Her temple is situated beneath a margosa in front of which an upright stone figures Pōtu Rāju. Her priest is an Uppara (a caste of saltworkers, well-drillers, and construction workers). In this temple the decision to conduct a festival is taken at the time of an assembly of important people. This is apparently not a very frequent event, since the buffalo is generally purchased long in advance when the village promises to perform a sacrifice, for example, on the occasion of an epidemic. At the time of purchase, Āsāḍis recount the story of the goddess and tie a piece of cloth dyed with turmeric to the horns of the very young buffalo that has been chosen. They will return for the jātra when they will be fed for the three days of the festival, and repeat the same story.

When the decision to hold the jātra has been made, funds are collected by a leader in each road of the village. This group of important people, the *jātra-peddaḷu*, presides over the festival (are they chosen from each of the locally represented castes?). The informant (a Rājulu wearing the kṣatriya thread and serving as pañcāyat chairman) states that even the Kōmatis (merchants) and Brahmans pay their share and go to the Poleramma temple, before the sacrifice, to offer coconuts and pongal.

On the first day, nine items are placed on an oxcart: a goat, cock, piglet, lemons, coconuts, eggs, etc. The cart is driven to the village's outer boundary, that is, to the perimeter of the fields under cultivation; there the nine items are left intact, and one returns in the direction of the Poleramma temple, while Cākalas try to get hold of the

different objects and animals left at the boundary. This is apparently a variant of the cult of the śaktis.

A clay image of Poleramma, which would have been ordered from the potter, is installed in a small temporary hut raised in the temple courtyard and facing Poleramma.

On the second day, at eight or nine o'clock in the morning, the buffalo is led on a pradakṣiṇā of the temple before being sacrificed between Pōtu Rāju and the goddess. The executioner is a Cākala. The body is left in place, and the head (without a leg in its mouth) is placed so as to face the goddess. Soon thereafter, a procession is taken out around the village in which all the participants follow the Cākala executioner, who carries his sacrificial knife. After this first procession has come to an end, the Cākala goes home. In the meantime, the Mādigas carry off the buffalo's body. And one Mādiga lifts the head and carries it over an approximately mile-long procession accompanied by the villagers and Poleramma's portable icon. The head and statue are left at the village's outer (theoretical?) boundary, where a Mādiga will come to take the head in order to eat the food that it supplies.

Finally, on the third day, the villagers slay goats and cocks at their houses and these are then eaten by the various families.

i. The Gaṅgamma Festival in Siddhavaṭṭam

Here the information is still more fragmentary: it was gathered from Mādigas in their quarter in Siddhavaṭṭam, and was followed by a brief visit to the Māṅkālamma temple.

It seems that three goddesses receive, or received, annual buffalo sacrifices in the locality: Gaṅgamma, Māṅkālamma, and Poleramma. It is clear in any case that Māṅkālamma concerns only the caste of fishermen, and that the Mādigas choose to depict the festival of Gaṅgamma, who is probably the principal grāmadevatā bringing all local castes together.

The festival lasts two days and takes place in Caitra (apparently always on the date of the spring Navarātri). The Mādigas point out that they contribute to the expenses, notably toward the purchase of the goat and the buffalo.

On the first day the Āsāḍis, accompanied by drums, recount the goddess's story. At about four in the afternoon, they go to the potter's house to get the image of Gaṅgamma and install it outside and in front of her sanctuary. A Mādiga brings a pole, which is Pōtu Rāju. The man dances, possessed by the goddess. A human form is then carved with a knife on the pole and a piece of cloth (male clothing?) is wrapped around it.

On the morning of the second day, an offering of cooked rice is made to Gaṅgamma and a goat is sacrificed before her. Rice is mixed with the goat's blood. A Cākala then immolates a buffalo. The body is left aside, while the head is placed in front of Gaṅgamma with a flour lamp on it and the right foreleg in its mouth. The rice mixed with goat's blood is borne by a Māla (a very low caste of agricultural laborers and scavengers) around the entire village and strewn everywhere along the periphery (as offering to the śaktis?). The Māla then returns to the temple. Devotees make pongal and slay the animals they themselves have brought, and cook and eat the meat in the same place.

On the evening of the same day, a Māla carries the buffalo's head, followed by the clay Gaṅgamma, toward the east for about a mile. The head and the goddess are left at

the village's "boundary," and Gaṅgamma's arms and legs are broken (a detail that probably required a low caste witness for it to have emerged in the account). A Māla will afterwards come to remove the buffalo's head. Pōtu Rāju's pole has followed this procession, but will then be returned to the Māṅkālamma temple. The Mādigas specify that the Gaṅgamma jātra is the only occasion on which they leave their quarter to worship. They receive one third of the buffalo for their personal consumption.

The visit to the Māṅkālamma temple essentially confirms what the Mādigas have said: namely, that it has, near the representation of Māṅkālamma, a processional icon of Pōtu Rāju fashioned of wood and painted in vivid colors. In front of the temple a very small tapering wooden post set in a cement platform is another Pōtu Rāju. But the fishermen here maintain that there is no pole present at the Gaṅgamma festival and that it is their Pōtu Rāju of painted wood who is taken out in procession. This statement reveals their contempt for the Mādigas, but one does not see how the latter would have been able to "invent" the pole—which, incidentally, is not present at the Māṅkālamma temple. Still to be explained is when and where it vanished; but this is a secondary problem. The fact that a human form is incised on the pole at the time of the festival seems to indicate that it is renewed for each year's festival.

j. Recollections of the Mannūru Jātra

In Mannūru, a relatively large temple dedicated to Ellamma is the property of the twenty-four villages in the surrounding area. In front of the temple, which is not located in any locality, a raised square platform is surmounted by a Pōtu Rāju, a low stone post of rectangular section. On the platform's eastern face (the temple faces east), a relief represents Jamadagni. The villagers present were unfamiliar with Ellamma's story, but they knew that Jamadagni was her husband. Thus, as is often the case, she is a popular form of Reṇukā. Pōtu Rāju is nonetheless her younger brother. The temple priest is from the Tambala caste (a priestly caste of variable status). Pūjās are performed every Tuesday at the temple, but a Balija (merchant) attends daily to the lamp that burns inside. There are five dharmakartās (prominent men who oversee a temple and its festivals): a Kāpu, Balija, Gāndla (oil-presser), and two Sattars (?) (weavers). A nawab had earlier donated lands to the castes attached to the temple's service (drummers and others), but the lands were gradually sold. The jātra, which took place during the month of Śrāvaṇa, has not been held in eight years. It was a festival lasting nine days (thus a kind of copy of Navarātri, but beyond the latter's two traditional dates in spring and autumn).

The first day begins with the immolation of a goat at what is called the *dhvajastambha* (a pole bearing the deity's emblem). It is in this instance a lengthy pole (plates 8 and 11), the fixed base of which, located on the other side of the road now passing in front of the temple, consists of three high steps of stones and mortar, and the first element of the shaft. The shaft's main portion is kept in the temple, lying on the ground. Its upper part, the ends of which have a particular form evoking the characteristic post of Pōtu Rāju, is in the same Ellamma sanctuary. The goat is offered to the pole's prone shaft before the pole is touched. The two dismantled pieces of wood are then set up on the base. A rope is put through the apparatus at the top and is used to raise a goat (rather than a flag). The goat is turned in the air for roughly an hour, after which it is

lowered and immolated at the pole's base. One recognizes that this is in fact a hook-swinging post, which thus finds itself taking on a new function.

The buffalo has in principle been purchased from the contributions of every house in the twenty-four villages. After the immolation of the second goat, the buffalo is led around the twenty-four villages in a procession that lasts the whole night and concludes at the temple, where the buffalo is sacrificed at about six on the morning of the second day. The executioner is an Etti (scavenger). He slays the animal behind the platform of Pōtu Rāju (who thus separates the goddess from the animal sacrificed) and in front of the empty swing. The head is left to face the goddess until the jātra's conclusion, a lamp lit on its top, the right foreleg in its mouth, and fat on its eyes. The body is removed by the Etti.

Since the first day, a clay image of Ellamma has been made and placed within the sanctuary in front of the permanent statue. From this time onward and for eight days, the processional *mūrti* (image) is taken out every evening on a different vehicle. It is accompanied by a painted wooden statue of Pōtu Rāju carried by a man who cavorts, dances, and is, in brief, possessed.

On the fifth day, a meal is offered in the pilgrims' shelter to a hundred and one unmarried young men. They are given five sweet dishes. While they eat, a man possessed by the goddess observes them and then rushes at them, provoking them to abandon their food and flee. The man is then appeased.

On the sixth day, the clay image of the goddess is carried under a banyan that faces the temple, and the Āsāḍis tell her story.

On the eighth day, she is carried to Mannūru, into the settlement itself, to a place where five men are led before her. They are provided with a long strip of cloth around their necks and beneath the armpits in such a way that they can be held like dogs on a leash. Possessed, they start to bark. The Ellamma priest throws water on them to appease them. The five are Gollas (herders) who specialize in this function.

On the ninth day, the temporary Ellamma is placed with great pomp on the swing in front of the temple. At midnight, the Āsāḍis carry her for about a mile while the Etti bears the buffalo's head in the company of the processional Pōtu Rāju. The head of the buffalo and the image of the goddess, after her arms and legs have been broken, are left there, and Pōtu Rāju is brought back to the temple.[14]

[14]The fact that Ellamma would be a popular variant of Reṇukā allows one to search the classical sources for the distant—and certainly forgotten—significance of one or another aspect of the rite. Are not the hundred and one young boys who are fed sweet dishes evocative of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hundred sons and one son-in-law in the *Mahābhārata*? These princes partook of the pleasures of kingship without having been suited for them, and were driven away from them in war by the Pāṇḍavas. The person possessed by the goddess, who plays here the role of disruptor, would be not the Pāṇḍavas themselves but their wife-in-common Draupadī, who urged them to fight and appears to be the veritable stake of battle. Mannūru is not far from North Arcot District in Tamilnadu where one finds Draupadī temples in great number. The five possessed dogs recall the barking devotees of the god Mailār-Khandobā, common to both Karṇāṭaka and Mahārāṣṭra, who are also shepherds by caste (Kurumba and Dhangar respectively). One finds Khandobā down into North Arcot, notably in Walajapet, where his temple belongs to a local group of Marāthas. In the myth recounted at the Walajapet temple, the dogs are asuras who have converted to the god's service. The dog is an impure animal in Hinduism. It is no doubt for this reason that, since the Veda, it has been the messenger of Yama, god of death.

k. The Buffalo Sacrifices in Mallavaram (Chittoor Dt., Chandragiri Tk.)

The inhabitants of Mallavaram seem to have retained the memory of a migration, since their protective deities Gaṅgamma, Siralamma, and Pōtu Rāju have come from Tukke in the mountains, and Gaṅgamma here bears the name Tukke Gaṅgamma. Siralamma is considered to be the eldest sister.

Gaṅgamma has two sanctuaries. The largest is located outside the settlement—to the northeast—and the other is situated in the village beneath a mango tree, where she has only an open-air shrine. The presence of two sanctuaries requires the purchase of two buffalo. The boundary temple is the property of the entire village—which appears to be well-off, populated by Reddis, Kōmatis, and even a few Brahmans. It is a roofless structure covered by fresh palm leaves (the goddess is said to have wanted her temple very urgently, and there was no time to construct a roof for her). Inside, Tukke Gaṅgamma is represented by an aniconic stone and two terra-cotta pots placed at the back (plate 12). One of the pots is carried filled with fire during the jātra, but it does not appear in the description I obtained of the jātra itself. The other pot, however, will find its place. Numerous tridents are set up against the back wall. A small wooden Pōtu Rāju, triangular in shape, has been placed to the right of the aniconic stone, slightly forward; but it cannot serve as a processional mūrti since Pōtu Rāju apparently takes no part in any procession. This could be the form in which he arrived from Tukke with the goddesses. In front of the sanctuary door, outside, are a balipīṭha and a Pōtu Rāju represented by the characteristic post fashioned of śamī wood, whose upper knob is very elongated in proportion to the body (plate 4). Gaṅgamma, who has a Palli (fisherman) priest, receives a daily pūjā.

The jātra takes place in Paṅguni (March-April). On the first day, two buffalo are purchased with money collected from the entire village. The first goes to be sacrificed on the same morning in front of the Gaṅgamma at the boundary: it is led on a pradakṣiṇā of the temple under the supervision of the head of the Mālas (different from the executioner mentioned below). When it reaches the sacrificial site, it is several steps behind the outer Pōtu Rāju. A clay statue of the goddess has been placed in front of the sanctuary. The buffalo is decapitated by a Māla and the head is placed on the ground near the stone for camphor offerings (also behind Pōtu Rāju), with the usual appurtenances. It remains there until evening. At the end of the day, pongal is prepared and offered to the goddess. That night, the Māla executioner carries the head for about a mile and leaves it at a spot outside the territory of the village. The clay image of Gaṅgamma accompanies it part of the way, as do the tridents and one of the earthen pots, which is filled with grains and decorated with a coconut and leaves of margosa and mango.[15] But all of this returns to join the Gaṅgamma in the village. Before this

But Yama also becomes the King of Dharma. In the epic itself, the dog embodies Dharma as the faithful companion of Yudhisthira, another dharmarāja, on his way to heaven. Thus the number five—evoking, among other things, the Pāṇḍavas—is transferred to the possessed-as-dogs, whereas it is a single possessed man who puts to flight the hundred and one young boys who eat five sweet dishes. One would have to lengthen indefinitely the chain of intermediary transformations to give more consistency to these preliminary connections. Regarding the "Goddess" aspects of the epic Draupadī, cf. Hiltebeitel 1980 and especially 1981.

[15]Prior to the description of the ritual, informants had spoken of a pot containing fire and representing the goddess, which took part in processions; but as mentioned above, it was not cited in the account.

goddess, one sacrifices a goat, a ram, and a buffalo. It is now about two in the morning. Once again, the head is left in front of the clay image of Gaṅgamma, who is located beneath the mango tree. About an hour later, the Māla takes it away along with the goddess's temporary statue, the earthen pot, and the tridents. The animal's head and the statue are left about a mile beyond the boundary. Along the route a man will be possessed by Pōtu Rāju, whipping himself and unable to utter a word: should he begin to speak, all would be lost, the world and the village.

The annual jātra for Siralamma involves fourteen villages and lasts for two days in Māci (February-March). As many as a hundred buffalo are sacrificed and then completely buried in the mountain. The carcasses are gathered up one year later, and are burned and offered as *naivedya* to the goddess before the undertaking of a new buffalo sacrifice.

B. Identification of the God

It is clear that Pōtu Rāju is associated with any blood sacrifice to a goddess—whether she is the protectress of a local caste group or of an entire village[16]—and more particularly with the goddess festival that culminates in a buffalo sacrifice. The latter can be an annual event or can be held more infrequently, with either fixed or variable periodicity, but it remains the goddess's major celebration. The buffalo is always sacrificed near a Pōtu Rāju, either that of the boundary (in front of the permanent sanctuary) or that of the village center. He represents a fixed point of reference for the sacrifice, whereas the goddess who attends the immolation is never the permanent representation found in the sanctuary, but a temporary clay image destined along with the buffalo's head to be abandoned, and probably always broken at the conclusion of the festival beyond the village boundary. Although the fragmentary data compiled do not entirely allow the generalization, it is likely that Pōtu Rāju participates in all the processions in which the sacrificial buffalo is present, whether still alive, or dead and reduced to its head. When he is not in the form of a pole carried by someone possessed, or an anthropomorphic processional icon, he is represented by the individual whom he possesses. Two kinds of possession have, in fact, been observed, and are not to be confused: possession by the goddess and by Pōtu Rāju. The person possessed by Pōtu Rāju, who on occasion carries the god in procession, is always chosen from among the lowest castes in the village, but not necessarily from the same caste as the executioner. In none of his forms is Pōtu Rāju abandoned with the goddess outside the boundary, as is the head of the buffalo.

[16]This is not the place to consider the problem O. Herrenschmidt (1981) raises about the village as a social unit. Possibly a closer investigation would reveal that at each location the festival of the grāmadevatā would exclude certain castes or certain quarters. Further, one would have to know the reason for this non-inclusion. On the other hand, it has been noted several times that the festival of one and the same goddess groups several localities together in what also seems to be called a *grāmam*. It should in any case be recognized that the goddess delimits a certain habitational unity outside of which one is no longer under her protection. A more precise definition in sociological terms is awaited. Cf. below, p. 316.

The inferior status of the god in relation to the goddess is seen in his position as a younger brother. It is above all this subordination of the one to the other that is connoted by the "big sister"-"little brother" relation, as in our own language: a subordination that implies a constant bond of service, protection, and devotion on the part of Pōtu Rāju toward the goddess.

1. Mythical Elements

Since Pōtu Rāju is localized in Āndhra, accounts collected there, for which the only convenient source is Elmore (1925), will be the considered first.[17] As Pōtu Rāju's myth, he gives only two versions of the myth of Reṇukā, for whom Pōtu Rāju's story would be an additional popular development. Since this figure is never an independent deity, it is not surprising that he would have no myth of his own and that his story would be attached to that of a great goddess of the Deccan. But the available information is too limited to allow one to affirm that this is always the case. Be that as it may, in the two accounts transmitted by Elmore (1925, 86 ff.), Reṇukā, with the consent of her husband, the Brahman Jamadagni, battles the rākṣasas to aid her royal father who cannot himself accomplish the task. During the battle she sees that from each drop of rākṣasa blood that falls to the ground a new rākṣasa is born. She thus summons her younger brother Pōtu Rāju, who immediately appears before her. To obtain his aid she offers him the promise of a sheep and a heap of rice, as high respectively as the sky and a palmyra.[18] Pōtu Rāju accedes to her request and Reṇukā enjoins him to extend his tongue over the entire kingdom of the rākṣasas so as to prevent a single blood drop from falling to the ground. In this way Reṇukā can defeat the rākṣasas.

The other version also tells the story of Pōtu Rāju's birth. The context is the same. Reṇukā, warring against the rākṣasas, sees that each drop of their blood produces a new rākṣasa when it falls to earth. She thus addresses the three gods of the Trimūrti, who appear before her in the form of Brahmans. As a solution, they propose to bring the rākṣasas to reproduce themselves in the same way as other living beings, by procreation. Their offspring would thus necessarily be more limited. Reṇukā, sensing that she is unable to accomplish this herself, asks the Trimūrti to take action. Still disguised as Brahmans, the three gods appear before the rākṣasas as astrologers having come to read their horoscopes. They foresee for them numerous descendants should they conform to normally respected laws. In fact, they prescribe that the rākṣasas embrace a tree trunk located near a tank, and the three gods transform themselves into a pipal, Śiva becoming the roots, Viṣṇu the trunk, and Brahmā the branches. When the first rākṣasa arrives, he embraces the trunk—that is, Viṣṇu—whereupon he becomes a woman and conceives. Following this experience, two other rākṣasas come forward, then a hundred. Three of them conceive and give birth to a hundred and two girls and one boy. But the rākṣasa

[17]The myth of Pōttarāca in Tamilnadu no longer has so much in common with that of Pōtu Rāju. Moreover, one finds in Āndhra an origin myth of the buffalo sacrifice similar to that in Karṇāṭaka, but it also makes no mention of Pōtu Rāju. There the buffalo is the goddess's consort (Whitehead 1921, 117).

[18]This promise seems to indicate that in sacrifices made to the goddess, a portion of the offerings must go to Pōtu Rāju, including an animal.

chiefs become angry upon hearing of this and order that the children be killed. They are thrown into a well (or the adjacent tank?), from which the three gods go to draw them out; but one child cannot be found. There are thus a hundred and one girls and one boy. The girls are the well-known śaktis who appeared in the ritual and whose mission is to incite disorder among men, but who remain at the same time in the service of the goddess. The boy is Pōtu Rāju, who will help Reṇukā to subdue the rākṣasas as described in the first version.

A myth of the goddess confronting the rākṣasas cannot fail to evoke the *Devī-māhātmya,* the foundational myth of the buffalo sacrifice, especially when known motifs reappear. In both versions, Pōtu Rāju's tongue must prevent rākṣasa blood from reaching the ground, whereas in the DM (8.54 ff.) it is the asura Raktabīja who reproduces himself by means of his spilt blood. The goddess asks Kālī to devour the numerous asuras and also to swallow the blood of the wounded asura to prevent this proliferation. One has thus passed from a goddess to a god, and Pōtu Rāju's large tongue is also suggestive of that of the buffalo, though without allowing one to identify the two, since the mythical buffalo decidedly takes the side of the asuras against the gods and the goddess. In moving from the *Devīmāhātmya* to the popular version, there would thus appear to be at least one inversion, if not two.

The second version is also noteworthy in that, while giving Pōtu Rāju's origin, it omits to make him the goddess's younger brother: proof that the relationship thus established is above all hierarchical. Pōtu Rāju and the śaktis are put into the goddess's service.

Furthermore, the pipal as an instrument of impregnation—comparable to the male organ—is an element of the classical Reṇukā myth, since it is by a rite that involves embracing two different trees that Satyavatī and her mother must conceive, and by which Satyavatī will give birth to Jamadagni, the princess Reṇukā's Brahman husband. One thus notes that the classical myth makes the male who is engendered by embracing a tree trunk Reṇukā's husband, and not her younger brother. Here, however, the rite is intended to prevent the uncontrollable proliferation of rākṣasas and to give them a mixed and no longer purely rākṣasic progeny. In the case of the classical Jamadagni, *brahman* is mixed with *kṣatra;* here one has an interbreeding that brings to mind Bhīma's union with the rākṣasī Hiḍimbā in the epic, the issue of which is a rākṣasic son completely devoted to the Pāṇḍavas' cause, and thereby to the cause of dharma, and not to that of the cousins who usurp the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom. The śaktis and Pōtu Rāju would by the same token have made up an infernal breed but instead consecrated themselves to the service of the goddess.

In the DM it is the gods, including the Trimūrti, who confide to the goddess the task of battling the asuras in order to regain the heavens for their ordained inhabitants, the gods themselves. Here the goddess turns to the Trimūrti to obtain their intervention. It is moreover only a stage, since Pōtu Rāju, who thus comes into existence, will then have to do what the goddess had asked of him in the first version. It is like a link added to the DM account, a further meander in the unfolding of the myth, one that is surely intended to express something more, or different.

Another remarkable element is no doubt of a similar order: the Trimūrti distribute themselves through the pipal inversely from the way they do in the liṅga, another male

symbol. In the liṅga, Brahmā is the base and Rudra-Śiva is the upper portion, while Viṣṇu finds himself once again in the mid-section and at the level of the *yoni,* thus ensuring the impregnation. If one is to attribute a meaning to this inversion, one might suppose that the fecundity of the "normal" liṅga ensures the prosperity of its devotees, whereas the trunk of the rākṣasa-impregnating pipal turns their progeny against their race. With Rudra-Śiva at the base, one indicates that in reality it is destruction and not prosperity that must ensue from the rite for those who perform it. In short, and confining oneself to Pōtu Rāju without considering the śaktis here, the myth brings out Pōtu Rāju's inferior status in relation to the goddess and the cannibalistic "nature" that destines him to redeem by way of violence situations where dharma is imperiled. From the rākṣasa he derives the positive aspect of "guardian"—*rakṣ*—of the brahmanical order, which only obtains when the rākṣasa subordinates himself to that order. And the goddess—she of the DM, as well as Reṇukā—is charged by the gods and the Trimūrti to reestablish that order.

The myths just evoked thus have more affinities with the DM than with the classical myth of Reṇukā, from which they borrow the motif of the fertilizing pipal, but with characteristic inversions: the goddess's feminine aid becomes the help of a male; the Trimūrti go to assist the goddess rather than being those who must call for her. The result is the creation of a being who, while having a demonic and thus inferior nature, is at the superior gods' service through the goddess's mediation. This ambiguous status of Pōtu Rāju brings him very near to what āgamic literature and practice calls a *kṣetra-pāla,* a guardian of the territory over which the sovereignty of the god or principal goddess holds sway. Also to be noted is the visual detail of Pōtu Rāju's large tongue which, in extending over the rākṣasa kingdom, evokes not only the tongue of the buffalo-asura, but even more so, and in conformity with the DM, the long red pendant tongue of Kālī.

2. His Name

The meaning of the name Pōtu Rāju has been clear for quite some time. In Telugu, *pōtu* employed alone is the male buffalo, and *rāju* is derived from the Sanskrit *rājan,* "king." Pōtu Rāju is thus the "Buffalo King."[19] This is evident, yet from high to low

[19]Ziegenbalg 1869, 137 was apparently the first to translate "Potu Raju" as "bull-king," but curiously on the basis of the Tamil form of the name, *Pōtturāsā*, whose meaning is less evident. With neither circumlocution nor commentary, the same translation is then given by Tirmal Rao Venkatesh (1884, 811) in the course of describing a fair with buffalo sacrifices in honor of the goddesses Durgava and Dayamava (= Lakṣmī). In this ritual performed in Karṇāṭaka, the *pōte-rāja* is a kind of double of Dayamava's consort from the Holeya caste (a low caste of agricultural laborers whose name, according to Thurston 1909, vol. 2, 329, has the same etymology as Paraiya and Pulaiya). As consort, he shows his position by addressing obscene remarks to Dayamava during the processions, whereas the Pōte-rāja intervenes after the buffalo sacrifice by hurling himself onto a lamb, tearing open its throat with his teeth, and drinking the blood. Running, he carries his victim beyond the village boundary, where he is beyond the reach of his pursuers. The lamb, which he appropriates in an asuric manner—by force, and without its having been offered to him—would be the portion of the consort-seducer of low caste, or of the buffalo demon who is reborn from it according to numerous variants of the myth. Thus only the heads of the sacrificed buffalo are buried, for which the goddesses mourn (for a similar description connected with Bellary Dt. [Mysore], see Fawcett 1889, cited by Oppert 1972, 475

caste, from the most uninformed to the most erudite, from the most traditional to the most "enlightened" of the Brahmans, no one in Āndhra acknowledges Pōtu Rāju's identity with Mahiṣāsura, the Buffalo King of the demons. How can this god, the goddess's younger brother, be at the same time the king of the asuras whom the goddess slays in the DM?[20]

Village ritual in Āndhra has shown the close association of Pōtu Rāju with the goddess festival, and more particularly with the buffalo sacrifice.[21] This association can be demonstrated on an entirely different level if one recalls that the post characteristic of Pōtu Rāju must be fashioned of wood from the śamī tree. The city of Vijayavāḍā, the old capital of Āndhra, is protected by the goddess Kanakadurgā, whose temple is located at the foot of the Indrakīla mountain on the town's border, overlooking the Krishnā river. There, the autumnal Navarātri was a royal ritual. That is why on Vijayādaśamī, the festival's tenth and last day, the śamīpūjā is still celebrated amid great pomp. Its performance has been transferred from the king (ideally a Kṣatriya, a "soldier") to the local police. Buffalo were formerly also slain on the festival's eighth and ninth days. There is no trace of Pōtu Rāju in Vijayavāḍā or anywhere around Kanakadurgā. On the other hand, the city has only one śamī,[22] which grows on private land. Every year for Vijayādaśamī,[23] a branch is cut from this tree and planted in a cement-lined hollow beneath two enormous pipals at the base of the Kanakadurgā temple. It is there that the śamīpūjā takes place. One laments the fact that year after year the śamī branch refuses to take root and consequently dies, but this is not surprising in the shade and among the roots of the two giant pipals. But there is no attempt to change the location of the śamī branch and give it a chance to grow, since it must not be planted anywhere else. Why? Because it has always been so; and furthermore, this was formerly the exact place where buffalo were sacrificed to Kanakadurgā. One is not far from Pōtu Rāju under his pipal.

n. 267, and by Thurston 1909, vol. 6, 312). Tirmal Rao Venkatesh must have known Telugu, but would perhaps not have made the connection between the human Pōte-rāja and the Pōtu Rāju standing guard before the goddess. Robertson (1938, 67-68) resumes this translation in connection with the Pot-rāj of Mahārāṣtra (cf. below), which has some merit, since Molesworth's Marāṭhī-English dictionary attempts to give a Sanskrit etymology (< *prota*) to the Pot-rāj's *pot* (s.v. pot). This no doubt explains the unawareness of T. Vetschera (1978, 106), who "has not found any proof for an etymological connection [of the word *potarāja*] with a Dravidian language," and instead provides fanciful etymologies.

[20]In Karṇāṭaka, the sacrificial buffalo is generally viewed as the goddess's husband, and in the myth becomes a man of low caste who weds the goddess, a young Brahman woman, by posing as a Brahman himself. The Pōtu Rāju *ksetrapāla* has disappeared and his human analogue is the possessed man in the ritual; a Holeya plays the role of husband, and the sacrificial buffalo the husband-seducer's punitive rebirth.

[21]It is true that this relationship has nothing very striking about it. Neither Elmore nor Whitehead mentioned the place of the Pōtu Rāju-post in their descriptions of the Āndhra buffalo sacrifice. For spectators foreign to the system, it would not have easily appeared. As to participants, they had not sufficiently conceptualized it to have placed it in evidence.

[22]Which I saw, but whose identity I cannot guarantee. Cf. above, p. 7, n. 5.

[23]The site of the Kanakadurgā temple would be where the goddess slew the demon Mahisa, which earned her the name Vijayā. But it is also where Arjuna fought hand-to-hand with Śiva (called here Malleśvara, "Lord of the wrestlers"). Strangely, this test, in which Śiva transformed the hero into a *piṇḍa,* a sacrificial offering ball, before letting him go is seen as a victory of Arjuna over Śiva, since the latter thus gave Arjuna his *pāśupata* weapon. *Vijaya* is also one of Arjuna's names. This is one of numerous sites in south India that make an association between the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* and Mahiṣāsuramardinī.

The clearest information, however, comes from Mahārāṣṭra, where Pōtu Rāju is found in two different forms associated with the buffalo sacrifice: the Mhasobā who appears in front of some temples to goddesses, at the entrance to a town, or on the boundary of a village; and the man from the Mahār caste (village watchmen) who assumes the role of Pot-rāj during the Navarātri festival. The former at least is immediately identifiable.

Mhasobā is almost always represented by one or more aniconic stones,[24] preferably a rounded outcrop of bare rock coated with a thick layer of red lead or minium.[25] Throughout this part of India at least, marking a deity with minium seems to signify that the god has protective functions for the surrounding territory, or for another deity, which translates into a terrible aspect (the color red): local goddesses, Mhasobā, Hanumān, Gaṇapati, Śani, and Bhairava have this trait in common, which unites dedicated vegetarians like Gaṇapati and Hanumān with meat-eating deities. In some Mhasobā shrines, such as the one at Mhasobā Gate (Puṇe, Ganeshkind Road), the goddess (there, Kāḷubāī) seems to be a secondary addition.

An identification of Mhasobā and Mahiṣa is made, although not all Maharashtrians agree about the Mahiṣa in question, who in any case has no kinship relation with the goddess. Sometimes it is a question of a Mahiṣadeva, though no one has anything to say about him; sometimes it is Mahiṣāsura who, by his death at the goddess's hands, obtained rebirth as her devotee and servant. For others, finally, it is indeed a question of the buffalo demon, but without the goddess's redemption; blood offerings are made to him while asking for (nonmartial) victory over an enemy.

Although the buffalo sacrifice is still well attested in Mahārāṣṭra, this is no longer an area where the goddess festival would entail a veritable slaughter of buffalo and goats—that is, as far as south India is concerned, one has left Karṇāṭaka. Rather than multiplying fragmentary probes, I will thus concentrate on a precise description that has the advantage of ensuring a revealing transition between Āndhra and Mahārāṣṭra, and of showing Mhasobā and the Pot-rāj together.[26] It is a question of the festival at the Ellamma temple in Ṣoḷāpur, an industrial city in the Deccan with a considerable Telugu

[24]It would be a mistake to include both the aniconic stone and the post in a single category simply because they are both aniconic. Posts differ among themselves, and when the post of Pōtu Rāju is fashioned of wood, it is interpreted as having a head and a body. In any case, a post has its own signification, the stone has another, and both can possibly relate to the same personage viewed from different angles. The rounded outcrop of bare rock also presents manifold possibilities, since it allows for so many "spontaneous" manifestations—*svayambhū*—of the deity. But when it is coated with red lead, the connotation is different (see below). Another distinction is evident: that of the rudimentary and the primitive. Not just any deity can be represented by a truly aniconic rock daubed with red, but only a more or less inferior deity in a hierarchical pantheon. It is Hinduism as a whole that demands this gradation of divine status, and there are no grounds for supposing that the stone is the appearance in Hinduism of a deity coming from elsewhere.

[25]I encountered a single Mhasobā represented by a recumbent buffalo in the round (75 centimeters in length) and also painted red, but independent of any sanctuary to the goddess. It is found in Nasik, on Mari Road (I owe this discovery to Françoise L'Hernault). Although the context has changed because of the city's expansion, it probably originally marked the entrance of a village (plate 13).

[26]We shall leave entirely aside the Mhaskobā in Vīr (Satara Dt.) who, in the hands of Dhangars, is no longer remembered as having once been buffalo and demon. He has been refitted with a story that has no connection with the goddess and her buffalo, and of course he receives no buffalo sacrifice.

colony (roughly 150,000 people in 1976). The latter is largely dominated by the Munura Kāpus or Munurvārs, a landowner caste from Āndhra engaged in the textile industry. Information pertaining to the festival was collected from the head of the community, the *yajamāna* of the festival, in short, the one who presides over all the essential moments of the ritual. His account moves readily from Āndhra—the village frame—to Mahārāṣṭra—the urban frame—in order to establish some precious connections between them. He thus acknowledges without difficulty the equivalence of Pōtu Rāju and Mhasobā and their common link with the buffalo sacrifice. He also gives two possible dates for the festival: during the month of Āṣādh (June-July), or at Navarātri. But it seems to be held during Āṣādh at Ṣoḷāpur. It is in any case a nine-day festival that begins on the first day of the bright fortnight. As for Ellamma, it will be recalled that she is one of the grāmadevatās in Āndhra. High-caste Maharashtrians give her rather the Sanskrit name Reṇukā, but Ellamma as such remains known in Mahārāṣṭra, where she recruits her devotees among Mahārs and Māṅgs.

On the first day of the festival, eight days before the sacrifice, the Pot-rāj,[27] a Mahār and as such a Maharashtrian, receives the command from either the village headman or, as here, the head of the local Telugu community, to go and invite all the participants to the sacrifice. The man dresses in women's clothes and wears his hair long, loose, and flowing. Around his sleeves he has wound a strip of cloth to protect himself, and he holds a small drum, a whip, and a lit *pot*. The *pot* is a long cotton wick made of very tightly twisted strips of cloth, larger at one end than the other: its form resembles that of the whip. The thicker end is soaked in oil and kept alight throughout the festival; it burns very slowly because of the wick's tightness. Thus equipped, the pot-rāj goes from house to house pronouncing his formula of invitation: "Sovereign mother, get up, get up, show yourself to be favorable." People welcome him by putting a vermilion mark on his forehead and pouring a little rice into his winnowing basket, and in exchange he gives ashes from his *pot,* or from the *yajñavedi* (a sacrificial altar with a firepit) in which a fire has been kept alight in front of the goddess since the beginning of the first day. This fire is maintained with wood from aśvattha (= pipal), sandal, udumbara, and khadira trees. A certain equivalence can be assumed between the fires of the *pot* and the *vedi,* or in any case between their ashes.

Looking ahead to the sacrifice, several buffalo are generally kept waiting, having been offered by various members of the Telugu community subsequent to vows they have made. On the day of the sacrifice of the preceding year, the Pot-rāj chose the

[27]Pot-rājs represent a subdivision of Mahārs who are characterized by this ritual function, just like those in Karnātaka among the Holeyas. Several dozen come together around the śamī for the śamīpūjā of Vijayādaśamī. See below, part 3, C, and plates 14 and 15. In daily life, one always meets them dressed in a kind of skirt made of cloth pieces originally intended for women's blouses, moving about in pairs and begging, one dancing while the other accompanies him with a tambourine. They are commonly called Laksmī-sadhus, sadhus devoted to the goddess Laksmīāī. Cf. Vetschera 1976 and 1978.

The Pot-rājs have, as a kind of female equivalent, mendicant devotees of Ellamma who, for Vijayādaśamī, carry a round basket in which is rolled up an ignited *pot* in all aspects similar to that of Pot-rāj and surrounded with betel leaves. Near the śamī they bless everyone with the *pots*' ashes, as do the Pot-rajs, and crouch on the ground in a row awaiting clients. Their *pots*, instead of being extended and held vertically like those of the men, remain rolled up in the baskets.

buffalo that would be sacrificed at the next festival: from that moment, the designated victim is provided with either a nose ring or a ring for one of its horns. It has thus wandered in this manner for a year, nourished by all and harmed by none.[28]

During the night of the eighth to ninth days the buffalo is sacrificed in front of the temple of the goddess. There, before the entrance, one sees an aniconic Mhasobā. Ellamma's priest is here a Koli (a caste of weavers and agricultural laborers), whereas in Āndhra he would be a Reddi (landowner). The goddess is represented by a rounded stone with a small metal mask attached on its top to show her head. At her side is Lakṣmī, while a Marīāī is enthroned in a parallel sanctuary that opens onto a common veranda.

The head of the community is taken in procession from his house to the temple. The Pot-rāj attaches a *pān-viḍā* (quid of betel) to the nape of the buffalo's neck and enters into a trance. A *bhakta* of the goddess, he performs an *ārati* before her with his *pot* and whips himself until blood is drawn. The head of the community then cuts the *pān-viḍā* in two with a sword: a symbolic gesture that is the buffalo's true putting to death. The Pot-rāj has only to slay it effectively, which he does between Mhasobā and the entrance to the temple. When the buffalo has been beheaded, both forelegs are placed in its mouth.[29] The body and the head are kept in front of Mhasobā, nearer to him than to the temple entrance: in fact, the buffalo is offered to Mhasobā alone to keep him from unleashing an epidemic, while the goddess receives only curd and rice. It is the goddess's vegetarian diet that is evidently affirmed here by my Kāpu chief informant, and appearances favor what he has to say, since there is not even a temporary image of the goddess made so that she might attend the sacrifice. But to offer a buffalo to the Buffalo would not seem to be very coherent, although it is not impossible (see below). Moreover, it is the goddess whom the festival is supposed to encourage to be propitious. The participants have for their part brought votive offerings of curd and rice, but also goats and cocks. At the same time, people declare that they seek to please the asura, but that the latter is under the goddess's sway. And in Mahārāṣṭra, like other areas of India, it is well known that the goddess has control over disease, notably epidemics. The best conclusion would thus seem to be that although the buffalo is sacrificed to Mhasobā, it is the goddess whom one must satisfy in the last resort.

The buffalo's head is then placed on a winnowing basket with the two forelegs in its mouth. The Pot-rāj carries it on his head in procession to the boundary and disposes of it beyond the boundary so as to avert evil from the territory. The procession returns to

[28]The same arrangement is seen in the sacrifice described by Tirmal Rao Venkatesh in Dharwar District, Karnātaka (cf. above, p. 24 n. 19), except for the fact that the victim is chosen three days after the sacrifice, that is, after a three-day period of mourning for the goddess Dayamava and her companion, who are undressed and dismantled (they are made of several pieces of interconnecting wood) and closed in the temple bedroom. The choice of the new buffalo again provides a new consort for Dayamava. For other variants of the buffalo sacrifice with Pot-rāj in Karnātaka, cf. Fawcett 1889, cited by Oppert 1972, 475 n. 267; Thurston 1909, vol. 4, 312; and more recently Hiltebeitel 1985, 171-79, 188-99.

[29]The detail of the two forelegs seems to be aberrant, the traditional practice being to put only one severed foreleg in the victim's mouth. This apparent aberration will soon perhaps be explicable. Let us note for now that, for the buffalo to be put to death, its neck is stretched by a rope that ties together the two forelegs and the consecration ring that it bears in its nostrils.

the temple and women bring water that they pour in front of the temple to purify it. The buffalo's body has been given to the *rāmośī* (the night watchman, a Mahār or Māṅg). The rice collected by the Pot-rāj during his eight-day tour of duty is cooked and distributed as *prasād* after having been offered to the goddess.

In the same city of Ṣoḷāpur, the Mahārs sacrifice their own buffalo in their own quarter. Mhasobā is their own god. He has a little sanctuary off line from that of Marīāī, and it is Marīāī who receives the buffalo sacrifice while Mhasobā contents himself with goats. The festival takes place at the same time as the one at the Ellamma temple. Its ritual is very similar, but appears to include mostly Māhārs. One detail commands attention: before the buffalo is sacrificed, the Pot-rāj climbs onto its back and, while upright, offers the goddess an ārati with his *pot* and dances there, reproducing the attitude of Mahiṣāsuramardinī in modern iconography. He is both the buffalo demon and the goddess who slays him, an identification conceivable only in the context of bhakti: the asura, having become the goddess's devotee, obeys her in everything and identifies himself with her. The Pot-rāj "dances the goddess" (to use the Tamil expression) just as he had previously in his own person whipped the buffalo demon. In dancing the goddess, he only anticipates the putting to death of the buffalo, which he does not carry out himself in this particular context. Having come back down to the ground, he performs a pūjā to the buffalo, coats its horns with minium, and sprinkles its head with vermilion. The yajamāna of this sacrifice in the Mahār quarter is by rule the *desmukh* of Ṣoḷāpur, the former local representative of power. It is he who must cut the pān-viḍā affixed to the nape of the buffalo's neck before the latter is beheaded with the *talwar* (sword) by the leader of the local Mahārs who bears the title Mahārāj. The buffalo sacrifice to the goddess is the act by which the local group of Mahārs integrates itself into local society and accepts the servile role that the Mahārs assume within it; as the buffalo is submissive to the goddess, Mahārs are subject to the local power that confines them to the bottom of the hierarchy, but in so doing attributes to them a place and functions of their own, among which is the impure task of sacrificing the buffalo.

The animal's entrails are mixed with wheat flour and oil and a cotton wick is inserted into the mixture to make a lamp that is then lit and set on the buffalo's head, which is itself placed before Marīāī. Alcohol is provided and everyone drinks before returning home to feast with his portion of meat from the victim, which has become prasād.

Finally, still in Ṣoḷāpur, the Pot-rājs of the region come together for Vijayādaśamī in the park where the śamīpūjā and sīmollaṅghana (the rite of crossing the limit, which marks the point of departure for military expeditions) are performed. They gather in the vicinity of the enormous śamī that is the pride of the city. In the śamīpūjā, the tree itself is the goddess who gives victory: it is Vijayā, Victory, or Aparājitā, the Unvanquished, and the leaves of the tree are of gold, which on the evening that concludes the festival friends and neighbors exchange with each other to wish a prosperous year.[30] The Pot-rājs, doubled here by the male and female devotees of Ellamma (Mahārs and Māṅgs), distribute the benediction of their ashes. An essential link must exist between the śamī and the Pot-rāj on the one hand, and the buffalo and the same Pot-rāj on the other, and

[30]Cf. below, pp. 299 ff., and Biardeau 1981a, 226 ff. (1984 for the English translation).

this link could be mediated by the ashes from the *pot* and the whip, which are present in the two cases. But considering that for many Hindus Navarātri, with its concluding Vijayādaśamī, celebrates the victory of the goddess over the buffalo demon, must one really separate them?

This brief Maharashtrian dossier will be completed by a rapid excursion to Nasik, to the buffalo figured in the round on Mari Road (plate 13), and to Mhase (Thane Dt.), where one rediscovers themes that have become familiar through Pōtu Rāju. In Nasik, only memories remain, since the official ban in 1947 marked the end of buffalo sacrifice—but what memories! The Vijayādaśamī festival took place facing Mhasobā and apparently in the absence of any goddess. An indeterminate number of buffalo were offered each year by the Gavḷīs (cattle herders). The festival consisted essentially of buffalo fights in which the vanquished were immolated in front of Mhasobā by a Mahār executioner, while the ultimate victor, Mhasobā himself, received divine honors for a period of one year. Set free near Mhasobā's stone form, the buffalo could then seek its food unhindered, as and where it wanted. The sacrificed buffalo were interred near the sanctuary. Here Mhasobā is Mahiṣāsura, but a king of demons redeemed by the goddess who has made him her guardian. This can be said confidently, even while noting that the goddess is absent from the very site. The notion of Mhasobā has not changed. If he can protect a locality, it is precisely because he is at the goddess's disposal.

In Mhase, a large fair mainly for selling buffalo is held annually on the full moon of Pauṣ (January). A small Mhasobā temple protects the fairgrounds, while the local goddess (aniconic and painted red) is found beneath a pipal. Mhasobā is represented by a "spontaneous" aniconic stone, although it does not appear to be an outcropping of solid rock. It is surprising to find a small Śiva liṅga, which is probably a later addition, beside Mhasobā in the same sanctuary. Living memory knows of no liṅga flanked by a Mhasobā, and still less the converse. The Brahman who comes to celebrate the annual festival at the temple goes so far as to say that the śāstras do not authorize a Mhasobā within the interior of a Śiva temple. But are there really normative texts that treat of Mhasobā, except by omission? Another particularity: outside the sanctuary, approximately ten meters from it toward the southeast, stands a thin, high (about two and a half meters) post whose upper end has been worn by inclement weather. A witness from the last century[31] describes it as coated with minium, stating that the sanctuary derives its name from it: it is the *khamb-liṅg*, the post-liṅga, and according to the same authority, the *khamb* (<skt. *skambha*, post) is the post, while *liṅg* refers to the liṅga within the interior of the sanctuary. Yet opinions are divided. For some, the post is the liṅga, for others (for example, the Brahman serving the temple once each year) it is identical with Mhasobā. Today the post has lost its red color, and no one has ever seen a red liṅga. Is it this hesitation regarding the identification that led to the disappearance of the layer of minium?

During the annual festival, the village, or rather the fifteen villages over which this unique Mhasobā stands guard, collectively immolate five goats. The animals are sacrificed in the northeast corner of the sanctuary, in exact symmetry with the Khamb-

[31] *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 14, Thana, Places of Interest, p. 284.

liṅg. Moreover, for each buffalo sold the owner proceeds to offer a pūjā to Mhasobā. Votive goats are also offered to the Khamb-liṅg. While they are on pilgrimage, women who have made vows (either on the occasion of an illness or so as to bear children) go to the post and plunge hooks into the skin of their sides, promising an offering of a coconut to the Khamb-liṅg should their wish be realized. It becomes evident that this is an ancient *bagāḍ* (the Marāṭhī name for the hook-swinging post) that retains something of its original function. Located near Mhasobā, it has been more or less identified with him,[32] but its form as a post, which is never the form of Mhasobā in Mahārāṣṭra, caused the incongruous appearance of a liṅga at the buffalo demon's site, which a skeptical Brahman now serves once a year. For this, it was probably necessary that the bagāḍ would have already lost its original significance. As at Mannūru, the goats would appear to be offered to the khamb-liṅg, but that indicates that the latter is Mhasobā.[33]

The detour by way of Mahārāṣṭra has made it possible to ascertain Pōtu Rāju's identity at an initial level. The Āndhra godling's obvious parallelism with Mhasobā and the Pot-rāj—and the frequent, if not unanimous, recognition of Mahiṣāsura in this loyal guardian of the goddess—confirms what the name Pōtu Rāju would already imply. The transparency of the name also leads one to assume that Āndhra villagers would not always have been unaware of his identity, and that it is indeed as the buffalo demon that he would have had his role in the cult, and more specifically in the buffalo sacrifice. That he would now be the goddess's younger brother belongs to the elements of myth that the lapse of memory has made necessary.

In the attempt to further ascertain the significance and place of this minor god, one is thus led to question what it is, in Āndhra, that constitutes Pōtu Rāju's characteristic form: the octagonal or round post topped with a kind of conical or faceted knob above a collar-like ring, without forgetting the śamī wood that is its obligatory material substance (cf. above, p. 7 and plates 1-4). Before observing the diffusion of this form and this substance nearly everywhere throughout south India (although one is never able to assign it an historical or geographical point of origins), it is time to advance a possible interpretation of this post, considering its form and its substance together. It is precisely the combination of the two in Pōtu Rāju that has determined this inquiry's methodological point of departure.

[32]Cf. in Āndhra, at Mannūru, the hook-swinging post found on the axis of the Ellamma temple, beyond Pōtu Rāju who stands as a stone post on the same axis (above, p. 21).

[33]A bagāḍ is also associated with the Mhaskobā temple in Vīr, but there is also one at Jejurī in the courtyard of the Khaṇḍobā temple, on the axis of the sanctuary (where Khaṇḍobā, avatāra of Śiva, is represented by a liṅga), and very near the anthropomorphic statue of the asura slain and redeemed by Khaṇḍobā. During bagāḍ ceremonies that take place in a suburb of Puṇe, one meets the rule that only men are admitted to the "hook-swinging," but women can also experience the "torture" of a bed of thorns or of a wound in the arm to cause blood to flow as an oblation. Cf. plates 17, 18, and 19.

II. His Vedic Ancestors

To delve into the past of Pōtu Rāju—a past without memory, almost devoid of historical reference point—is a complex task, first, because one must treat separately his form and his material substance to subsequently perceive what unites them in a single symbol. In addition, Vedic data are not simple, to say the least. To go back to them does not mean that they are an absolute origin from an historic point of view. Moreover, we will not linger over the most ancient features recorded in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* or *Atharvaveda*. It is, rather, the constitution of an immense corpus of ritual that provides the essential fulcrum. This corpus has both its properly Vedic, "revealed" part, and the sūtras that comment upon it: erudite, sophisticated thought with full mastery of its language and the word play it permits, the work of sacerdotal castes whose task is to know and perform the rites in conformity with the canons of their respective schools. This literature was practically complete before the Christian era, while concomitantly the epics reutilized much of its content in an entirely different register as the principal source of inspiration for the royal castes. By definition, we cannot know a great deal about what took place at the other end of the social spectrum. Even if Buddhism and Jainism present different aspects of the same society, the choices they made no doubt allowed many facts to go unperceived or to be willfully disregarded. The present study assumes that brahmanical society was already at an ancient date comprised of high castes, but also of castes that were less high and even very low, and which were indispensable for vital necessities. One faces the attendant problem of knowing at which moment one is no longer within this society, but outside it; for example, in a tribal society that would want nothing to do with Brahmans. But this is perhaps not truly a problem. From the moment when populations live in one and the same territory, life is organized together even on the religious plane. It is, therefore, not precluded but rather even recommended that one assume that brahmanical ascendancy, making itself felt by society as a whole, provided models which, while having been transmitted, underwent modifications to adjust to the sectors of society that received them, or that indeed welcomed them. From this perspective, it becomes pointless to ask what is brahmanic and what is not. It is evident that those who entered from the north would not have found before them a socioreligious vacuum should they have encountered other people. However, it appears just as clearly that, after more than two millennia of symbiosis, we

have no means of reconstructing what the indigenous populations were prior to the newcomers' arrival. On the other hand, one may be tempted to discern in current popular practices brahmanical models that have been transformed, deformed, and even at first glance made unrecognizable. These two millennia must have left traces, and the higher society has not ceased to weigh upon the lower; or, if one prefers, the upper echelon of society managed to diffuse its norms, choices, and obsessions by virtue of its mere presence.[1]

The specific object that motivates this return to the sources, namely the little god of Āndhra, calls for the study of Vedic sacrifice, in particular animal sacrifice. The latter held an important place in brahmanic ritual before being abandoned and replaced by surrogates, and perhaps even left or confided to others who were not from the sacerdotal upper castes. Two elements hold our attention most strongly in this animal sacrifice: the sacrificial post, because of Pōtu Rāju's particular form; and the production of the sacrificial fire in connection with the wood from which Pōtu Rāju is fashioned. One will thus be better equipped to observe the vast diffusion across south India (and no doubt farther than that) of the symbolic whole that is thus derived.

A. The Sacrificial Post

1. Its Form

Since it is a question of ritual, one can at no time isolate the post-as-object from the manipulations that concern it. Therefore, to treat its form is essentially to describe and understand the ritual that governs its preparation, from the moment it is felled until its shaping has been completed.[2]

The symbolism of the post is, however, elusive, and the ritual did not continue to be performed in all its details. Nor has ethnographic inquiry supplied further information, whether oral or textual (in Orissa, see below), on the intallation ritual for a Pōtu Rāju.[3] Moreover, the account given here of the ritual of the Vedic post (yūpa) cannot conceal a certain bias. I have privileged what affords a symbolic link between the post and certain of its counterparts: the fire, the sacrificer, the victim, the altars, such and such a rite, in brief, all that is susceptible to overdetermining the notion of the sacrificial post and giving rise to speculation and subsequent practices.

[1]Cf. Moffatt 1979.

[2]For all information pertaining to Vedic ritual, Schwab 1886 remains a classic, even though other texts have since supplemented his sources. The ritual variations introduced since do not significantly change the basic schema. On the other hand, the points of obscurity in his study are for the most part still recondite. What is known of the subsequent erudite tradition would lead one to suppose an oral commentary consistently associated with the didactic texts. In any case, Schwab had at his disposal the most important sūtras of the Taittirīya school of the Black Yajurveda, in addition to the sūtras of the White Yajurveda, which remain the principal sources of information.

[3]Much more is known about tribal practices in Orissa from the work of Eschmann, Kulke, and Tripathi (1978) than about the preparation and installation of a post for the buffalo sacrifice to the goddess in the same region. The dearth of information does not imply the total absence of the ritual, but it is perhaps too late to record a good description. See below, pp. 76 ff.

It would appear that the most ancient procedure entailed the kindling of a sacrificial fire in the forest at the place where the post was to be fashioned. Into this fire one poured, concurrently with the felling and squaring of the post, spoonfuls of melted butter. Later, it sufficed to offer butter into the fire before departing for the forest, and even these first libations became optional (Schwab, xxiii). Libations or not, the *adhvaryu* sets forth for the forest with the sacrificer and a carpenter, provided with a vessel containing melted butter, a ladle, a blade of darbha grass, a small piece of gold, and a pot of water. The carpenter has been given an axe. The tree most highly esteemed for the post used in the independent animal sacrifice[4] is the *palāśa* (*Butea frondosa*, Roxb.), but the *khadira* (*Mimosa catechu,* Roxb.) is also accepted, as is the *udumbara* (*Ficus glomerata*). In the absence of these trees, a *bilva* (*Aegle marmelos,* Correa) or a *rohitaka* (*Andersonia rohitaka*) will suffice. One of course endeavors to relate each tree to a particular wish of the sacrificer. The śamī seems to be excluded from the list of possible trees, even when the list gets larger.

The chosen tree is first consecrated by anointing it with clarified butter, which the adhvaryu spreads around the entire trunk at its base with the end of the ladle. He places the blade of darbha grass, tip upward, on the place to be struck, asking that it should protect the tree, and he himself strikes—if it is not the carpenter who does so—the first blow of the axe horizontally over the blade of grass. He collects the first chip fallen from the tree and carefully preserves it. The tree should not fall toward the south (the only direction that all authors exclude), and the adhvaryu prays that it damage neither the firmament nor the air while falling: it has been promised to the earth. Once the tree is felled, he anoints the surface of the stump where it has been cut, wishing it to grow again with one hundred branches, while asking for a growth of a thousand branches (descendants) for himself and, no doubt, for the sacrificer and other celebrants.

Indications as to the length of the post vary greatly, above all if one considers the animal sacrifices that accompany *soma* sacrifices. *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* 7.2.14-15 mentions the height of the yajamāna, arms raised or standing on a chariot, as being the minimum height to be given to the post (following TS 6.3.4.1 and 3), and scattered references to the post (or to the angle of the post facing the *āhavanīya* fire) that *is* the sacrificer must have reinforced this account of the sacrificer as measure of the post.[5] This height includes the base, which is to be set into the ground and will not be further

[4]Schwab describes the animal sacrifice as it is detached from all others, serving as a paradigm for all animal sacrifices that are part of the soma sacrifices.

[5]Cf. the golden *puruṣa* of the Agnicayana placed at the base of the fire altar which, for obvious reasons, is not of the height of the sacrificer, but on top of which the sacrificer must stretch out at a given time, and who appears to have upraised arms (either his, or those formed by the two sacrificial spoons placed at his sides). Cf. ŚPB 7.4.1.15 ff. The raised arms could symbolize the cosmic function of the sacrificer and of the post (analogous to that of Prajāpati, the cosmic Puruṣa) supporting heaven and earth. It is, however, also a gesture of victory. As it is of gold, it is also the sacrificial fire (Malamoud 1975a, 211). Is it not astonishing, but at the same time immediately intelligible, to find in the Tamil countryside, at Kōyilvaḷi (Palladam Taluk, Coimbatore District), a small temple dedicated to Kaṟuppurāyasvāmi around a bilva tree that protrudes through the roof and protects it with its foliage, where the god is sculpted in the trunk in human form with his two arms raised straight into the air (see below, p. 249, and plate 100)? Kaṟuppu is a lesser god (the "Black") who is often associated with his master Aiyaṉār-Śāstā.

hewn, and the faceted shaft. To this must be added a length, varying according to different texts, that is to be worked into the form of a tenon (Schwab 1886, 9) at the upper end of the post, upon which the *caṣāla* is to be attached. Whatever the caṣāla's height, the tenon should be measured in such a way that it projects beyond it. The carpenter hews the remainder of the post, between the base and the tenon, into a square or octagonal shape (but references to octagonal posts are by far the most numerous). He may make it the same thickness from one end to the other, or he may fashion a slight bulge in the middle.

The caṣāla, a kind of thick ring that will crown the post at the time of its erection, is taken from the upper part of the felled tree, or even from the part immediately adjacent to the post. Like the post, it is shaped with four or eight corners, in such a manner that their corners coincide exactly, and then hollowed out so as to be slipped onto the tenon at the top of the post. A supplementary detail: it must be inwardly curved in its middle, which, as Schwab observes (1886, 10), makes it resemble a mortar without a bottom.[6] I shall, in the appropriate place, attempt to give a different interpretation.[7]

From the wood removed during the shaping of the post, a chip, called *svaru,* is taken (Schwab 1886, 11); the term designates the post itself in RS 3.8, a hymn dedicated to the sacrificial post. In the codified ritual, the svaru seems to be no more than a reduction of the post that is meant to replace the latter during certain manipulations requiring its mobility (see below).

The different pieces of wood are then taken to the sacrificial site. The post will be put in place somewhat later, after the digging of the *vedi,* the laying out of the *mahā-vedi,* and the construction of the *uttara-vedi*. Its erection therefore requires the presence of these different vedis; the interval between its hewing and the insertion of its base into the hole dug for it implicitly establishes a connection between the post and the sacrificial altar. It is after we have looked at a drawing of the vedi that the caṣāla will take on a new meaning, more congruent with the sacrificial context and the ritual words that accompany the post's erection. The yūpa is erected at the center of the eastern side of the mahā-vedi, half within and half without. This median point is, moreover, the end of the central axis of the entire configuration of the vedis, the other extremity of which begins at the middle of the western entrance of the sacrificer's shed and traverses the exact middle of the *gārhapatya* fire (brought from the house of the sacrificer), the vedi, the first offering fire (*āhavanīya*), the mahā-vedi, and the uttara-vedi, traversing the latter's "navel" [*nābhi*], which bears the second offering fire. In the sacrificer's shed, the gārhapatya is near the western entrance; the *dakṣiṇa* ("southern") fire, having the shape of the half moon, is near the southern entrance; and the āhavanīya is on the axis at the eastern entrance. The vedi is laid out in the center by digging a shallow trapezoid in the earth, the corners of which are extended and raised, while the middle of the northern and southern sides curve inward. The sacrificer and adhvaryu position themselves near the āhavanīya, while the place of the sacrificer's wife is near the gārhapatya fire, which reinforces the connection between the sacrificial shed and the couple's house.

[6]Eggeling, in his translation ŚPB (SBE 26, Part 2, p. 168 n. 1) takes up Schwab's image again.

[7]As the yūpa remains the focus of the search for meaning, the design and construction of the different vedis will be cursory, summarized by a line drawing (fig. 1).

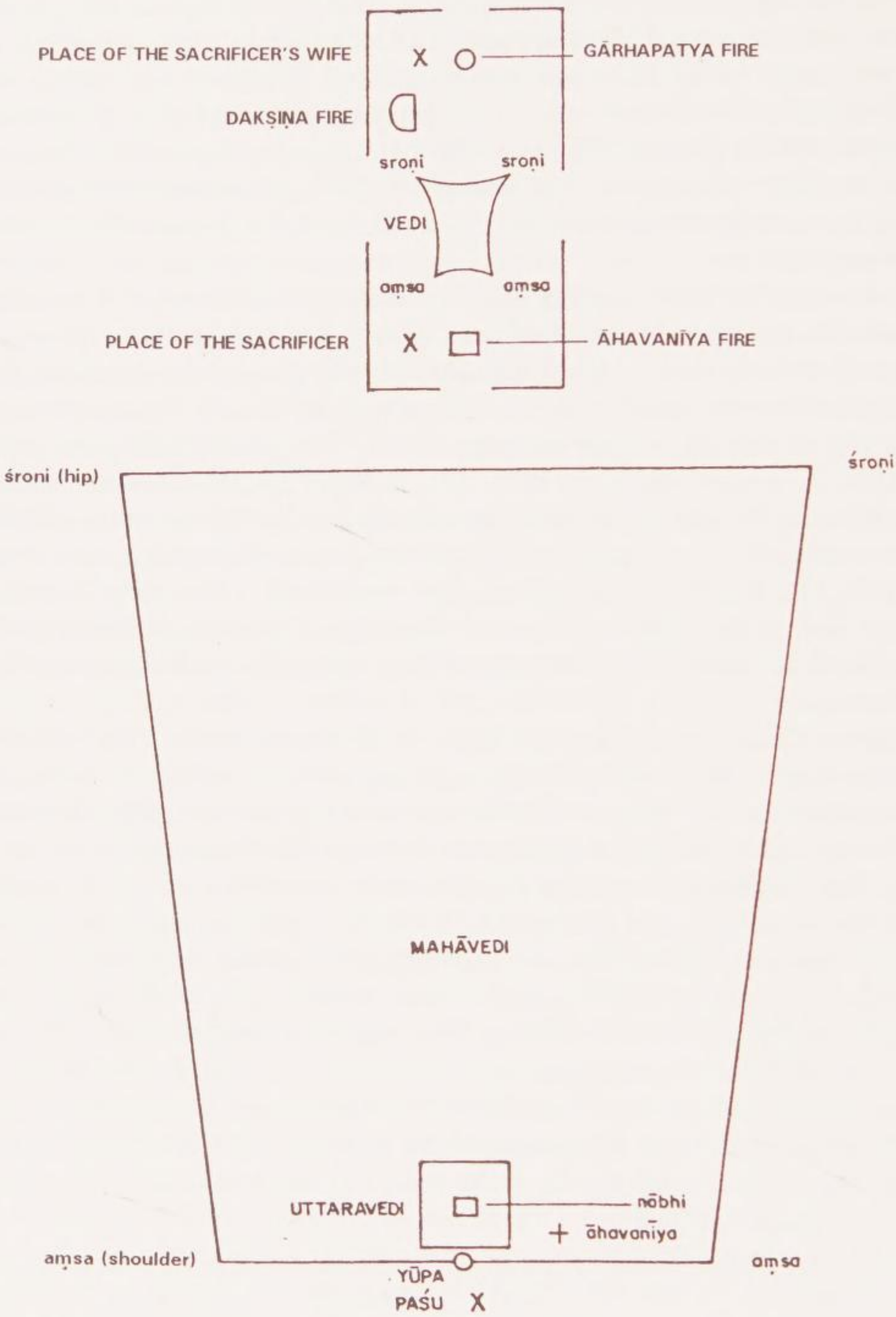

Fig. 1. The sacrificial altar

The mahā-vedi keeps the same axis, but the light construction of the covered shed provided with four entrances is absent. It is given its trapezoidal form by means of stakes connected by a rope, and is built to the east and on the axis of the uttara-vedi (the "higher" vedi, because it is higher than the others). Depending on the sacrifice to be performed, the uttara-vedi will either be confined to this raised square, the center of which is marked by a navel (*nābhi*) upon which the second āhavanīya fire is placed; or it will be completed in a schematic manner by the addition of wings and a tail, through which it becomes a rapacious bird. To be noted is the proximity of the uttara-vedi fire to the axial hole that will accommodate the post.

At first glance, the vedi and the mahā-vedi appear to replicate each other. The eastern sides of each, narrower than the western sides, correspond at each end to *aṃsas*, "shoulders," while the western sides are designated at their extremities by the term *śroṇi*, "hips." It is therefore the notion of a human body that emerges, or rather a torso, the width of the hips indicating that it is more particularly the torso of a woman. However, the vedi in the shed bears an additional intimation that, from a purely formal point of view, changes to a certainty what had been a supposition: the four corners, extended and slightly raised, suggest female limbs opening to receive the spouse, thus completed by the indication of the wider waist. The woman-vedi thus symbolized is first of all the sacrificer's wife, but she is also the Earth who unites with her spouse, the Fire, to be impregnated by him. More generally, it can be said that she is the female form of divinity, since it is difficult to speak of the Goddess in connection with Vedic literature. The texts themselves are clear regarding this symbolism,[8] and, as many Hindus would know, an attractive woman is *vedi-madhyā*, "one who has the waist of a sacrificial altar." Things that take place in the sacrificer's shed during the performance of the ritual are, therefore, the happy aspect, both erotic and fecundating, of the sacrifice. If this vedi also symbolizes the Earth, it is because the type of person sacrificing is the universal king for whom the Earth is his wife-as-realm, or again the *kṣetra*, "the field" that he fecundates by his pious acts. But the Earth is also symbolized by a square, the four corners of which are in relation to the four cardinal points, returning us now to the uttara-vedi, whose oblation fire occupies the center near the post.

There remains the mahā-vedi, which also evokes a woman's torso, this time with neither a thin waist nor extended corners. But her general form, her shoulders and hips, can only be those of a woman; perhaps a woman who is no longer in the happy position evoked by the first woman. In order to decipher this last part of the sacrificial terrain,

[8]Cf. ŚPB 1.2.5.15-16 (cited in part by Hillebrandt 1977, 190): *yoṣā vai vedir vṛṣāgniḥ, parigṛhya vai yoṣā vṛṣānam śete, mithunam evaitat, prajananam kriyate, tasmād abhito'gnim aṃsā unnayati. Sā vai paścād varīyasī syāt, madhye saṃhvāritā, punaḥ purastād urveyam iva hi yosām praśaṃsanti pṛthuśronir vimṛstāntarāṃsā madhye saṅgrāhyeti justām evainām etad devebhyaḥ karoti.* "For the altar (*vedi*, fem.) is female and the fire (*agni*, masc.) is male; and the woman lies embracing the man: thereby a copulation productive of offspring is obtained. For this reason one extends the two shoulders (of the altar) along both sides of the fire. It (the altar) should be broader on the west side, contracted in the middle, and broad again on the east side; for thus shaped they praise a woman: 'broad about the hips, somewhat narrower between the shoulders, and contracted in the middle (or, about the waist).' Thereby he makes it (the altar) pleasing to the gods" (Eggeling [1882-1900] 1900, vol. 1, 63, slightly modified).

we should remember that, regarding its position, the sacrificial post is erected on the central point of its eastern boundary, half within and half without. Its hole is dug at that spot. For the time being, the post lies on the ground next to the hole, its top turned toward the east. The adhvaryu cleanses the post with water, then sprinkles it from top to bottom with water containing barley. He pours the remainder of this water and the barley grains into the hole that is to accommodate the yūpa, and also places at the bottom of the hole a tuft of grass, the tips of which are turned toward the east, and then a chip removed from the post (but different from the svaru) upon which he has placed a small piece of gold. He consecrates all this with a spoonful of melted butter, an offering to Heaven and Earth if one credits the words spoken at the same time by the sacrificer: the sacrificial post (in conjunction with the fire) will unite Heaven and Earth.[9] One then proceeds to the consecration of the post. The yajamāna anoints the entire yūpa (or only its top) with melted butter using the svaru, or another chip removed from the post as it was being hewn, or again using the ladle. He anoints the caṣāla as well, on both the inside and outside, and slips it onto the yūpa. The adhvaryu, for his part, takes it upon himself to besmear with the spoon, in a single uninterrupted motion, the angle of the post that will face the āhavanīya fire down to but not including the base. At this juncture, until it is put in the ground, the sacrificer (and eventually his wife) puts his hand on the post. The adhvaryu then places the yūpa in its hole, taking care to adjust the angle that has been specially consecrated to be on the axis of the uttara-vedi, which is also that of the fire located at the center. The final preparation for the yūpa: the adhvaryu slightly inclines the tenon in the direction of the same fire, no doubt as a token of respect for the Fire god.[10] The hole is then carefully filled with earth, at least so much as to completely cover the post's base, which has been neither hewn nor consecrated, and the earth around the entire post is sprinkled with water.[11]

The most obscure part of the Vedic post is certainly the caṣāla. The term itself is not very clear (see Mayrhofer, KeWA, s.v. caṣāla). The Böhtlingk-Roth dictionary (SW) provides two meanings: a wooden ring crowning the summit of the yūpa, and a hive. A third significance, however, would derive from *Maitrayāṇī-saṃhitā* 1.6.3, where it is said that, "in the beginning the earth had the dimension of the caṣāla of a boar," by which, moreover, it (the earth) had been "torn out," *vihata*. If one compares the text

[9]Cf. Schwab 1886, 68ff., with numerous Vedic references and explanatory sūtras.

[10]Fig. 2. Stone posts commemorating sacrifices, whose upper extremities are distinctly curved, are stylizations of the sacrificial post, not realistic reproductions. Cf. Chhabra 1947 and, from earlier, a design of two commemorative posts in Īsāpur (near Mathurā) reproduced by Vogel (1910-11, plate 16 here). The effect of the transformation suggests, with the top of the post, a human left shoulder, the one that bears the sacred thread, and also recalls that the sacrificer and the post are one and the same. This post-sacrificer faces the north, as the victim often does.

[11]It is to be noted that the caṣāla and the tenon over which it is placed evoke the yoni with its inwardly curved base and the liṅga, in the case of a votive liṅga. The upper surface of the inwardly curved base reproduces the *yoni* (the vagina complementing the male organ) of the Śiva sanctuary, while the curved base itself encompasses the octagonal shaft up to its horizontal base, so that the post would not only be the puruṣa, but the sacrificing couple. The shaft constitutes the median part of the post and of the liṅga, in the latter case being the part that remains unseen. The tenon penetrates the caṣāla, which could thus be the vertical and three-dimensional projection of the form of the inwardly curved and feminine vedi (plate 20).

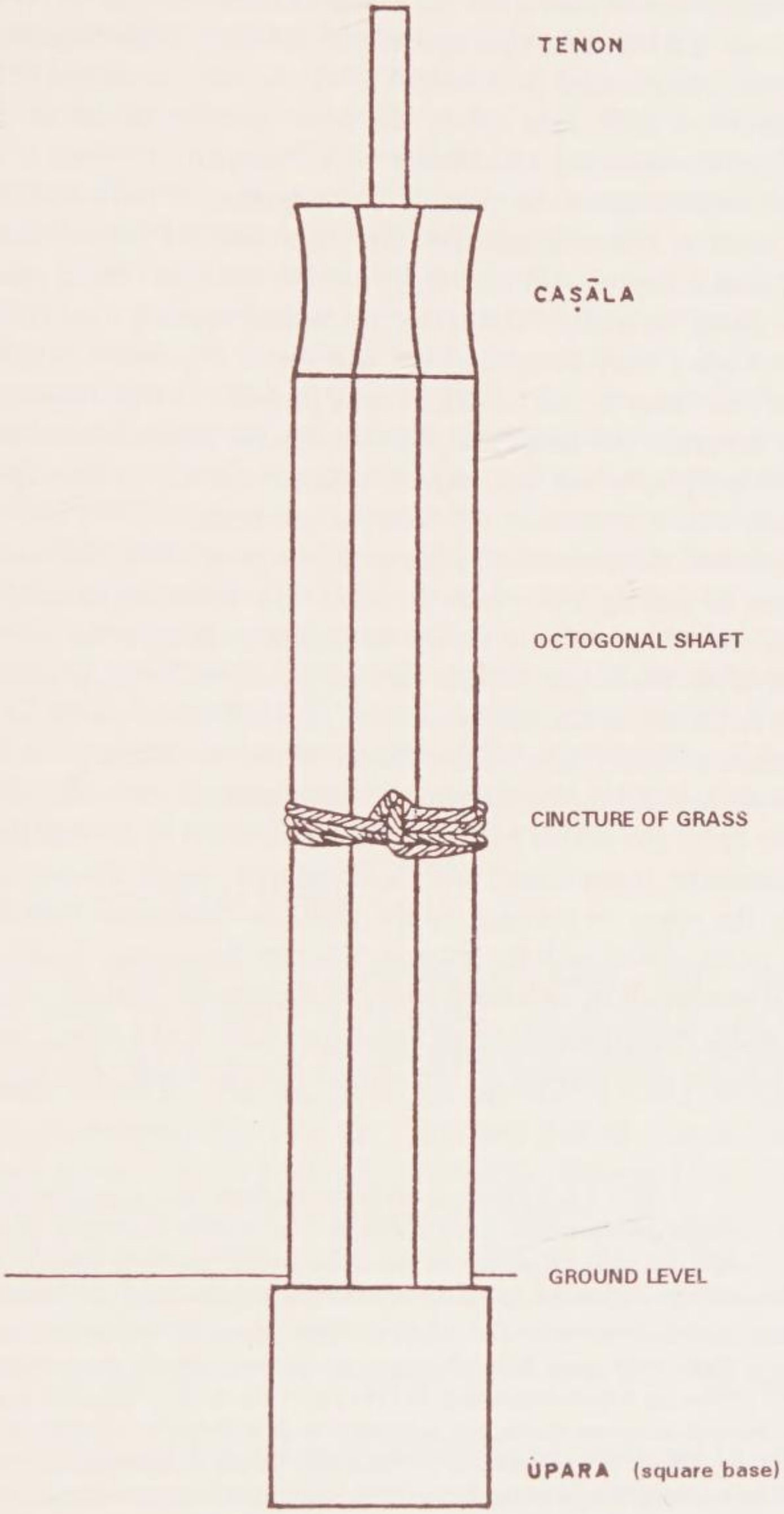

Fig. 2. The yūpa

of *Kaṭhaka-saṃhitā* 8.2 (another *saṃhitā* of the Black Yajurveda), where *caṣāla* is replaced by *mukha,* one understands that the caṣāla here is the boar's snout. One also knows that between this boar that tears out a clod of earth the size of its snout, softens it and spreads it out, and the earth thus spread out (*pṛthivī*), a cosmogonic and sexually fruitful relationship is established (KS, ibid., TS 7.1.5.1, etc.). Another important detail: it is on this "point" of earth torn out by the boar that the sacrificial fire is placed. Moreover, the boar is eventually identifiable with Prajāpati (TS, ibid.), even before it becomes the Sacrificial Boar of the purāṇic cosmogonies, a form assumed by Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa at the dawn of a new cosmic day, and the avatāra of Viṣṇu. One is still closer to the sacrificial caṣāla than would appear, since this wooden ring is continually associated with the idea of fecundity. The image invariably applied to it in the ritual texts is that of a tree bearing fruit at the top: the unction of the caṣāla is made so that the fruits of the post-tree—that is, the sacrifice—may increase. Furthermore, the top of the post touches the heavens. The tenon that extends beyond is sometimes described as the ultimate step of Viṣṇu, by which he conquers celestial spaces, or his supreme dwelling place;[12] sometimes it is attributed to the Sādhyas (cf. Kuiper 1979, 242-44), while the caṣāla belongs to Indra. Notwithstanding the great obscurity of the Sādhyas, these divinities have the merit of bearing a transparent name: they designate precisely the fruits of the sacrifice, that which one seeks to obtain through it. It is what the sacrifice gives "in excess" (the part of the tenon that extends beyond the caṣāla being what *is* "in excess").

The yūpa, up to the top of the octagonal shaft, excluding the tenon, is the sacrificer. It is also symbolically identified with the victim whom he will offer in his own place. When the sacrificer touches the post during its consecration, his wife must in principle do so at the same time. But which part of her is represented in the totality of the yūpa? Generally, the feminine is associated with horizontality, while the masculine—such as that signified by the yūpa—is vertical. In the vedi, the woman is represented as lying down, and is even identified with the ground, whereas her spouse Agni, the Fire, must have flames well nourished by oblations with clarified butter that rise clear and smokeless toward the gods. Notwithstanding its masculine gender as a noun, the caṣāla placed over the tenon insures the presence of the spouse (of the Earth, the kingdom, perhaps

[12]As found in KU 3.9. Cf. TS 1.3.6.8-13: *devás tvā savitā mádhvānaktu, supippalābhyas tvaúṣadhībhya, úd divam stabhānāntárikṣam pṛṇa pṛthivīm úparena dṛṃha. <té te dhāmānyuśmasi gamádhye gāvo yátra bhūriśṛṅgā ayāsaḥ, átrāha tád urugāyásya víṣṇoḥ paramám padám áva bhāti bhūreḥ* (RS 1.154.6, with variants); *víṣṇoḥ kármāṇi paśyata yáto vratāni paspaśé, índrasya yújyaḥ sákhā; tád víṣṇoḥ paramám padám sáda paśyanti sūráyaḥ, divīvacákṣur ātatam* (RS 1.22.19). "May the god Savitar anoint you with honey. You, who are to (provide) plants with good fruits! Support the heavens, fill the atmosphere, with your base strengthen the earth" (following Keith's translation ([1914] 1967, vol. 1, 41). "We wish to go to your abodes, where there (are) cows with numerous horns, and indefatigable. It is there that the supreme dwelling place of vast far-stepping Visnu shines towards (earth)" (following Renou's translation [1966, 35, excepting variations]). "See the exploits of Visnu where he, Indra's friend, makes his laws clear. This ultimate step of Visnu, the sages stare at it permanently, like an eye stretched across the heavens" (following Keith, ibid.). These formulae are spoken during the installation of the yūpa. "Plants with good fruits" accompanies the placement of the caṣāla on the tenon of the post. RS 1.154.6 is pronounced when the base of the post is put into the ground, while RS 1.22.19 is linked with the exact setting of the angle of the post on the axis of the uttara-vedi (Keith, ibid.). The top of the post is merged with the highest of Visnu's three steps, the ultimate place.

later of the Goddess) on the post, or in the very structure of the yūpa itself. However, the sacrificer-post, as noted, is also the post-victim. The verdant fecundity of the caṣāla is that of the Earth, thanks to which plants, animals, and men grow and are nourished. In such circumstances, the caṣāla on the victim-post is perhaps not so consenting as the vedi: it is held there forcibly by the tenon upon which it is placed. Connotations of the same nature are to be found later (see below, pp. 111 ff. and particularly 164 ff.). In other words, the caṣāla is an inwardly curved female corporeal form, but it is held to the post by the tenon (the male organ of this *puruṣa* that penetrates it? Later it will play the role of the impalement stake). As an hypothesis, one may suppose that the sexual union symbolized by the post is a union that implies the woman's suffering, just as the post-puruṣa suffers prior to, and with, the victim (see the references just mentioned, where the post and victim are henceforth completely identical). Perhaps one can then differentiate the vedi from the mahā-vedi, although they were seen to have been in part identical: the mahā-vedi is no longer the happy woman who receives the spouse. Rather, it is an inert and suffering body, forced into this union, that must resign itself to this situation. The sacrifice, in any case, is associated with a suffering that the Vedic texts minimize so as to attenuate the proximity to violence and death. But the fecund woman (= the caṣāla bearing leaves and fruit) has more to suffer from the sacrifice than her spouse. Personifying the Earth, every tree felled, every grain pounded, every animal put to death is a cause of suffering for her, since each is one of her offspring. The *Mahābhārata,* no doubt at a later date, will show the suffering of the Earth associated with each act of war, a new form of sacrifice. The sacrifice thus includes, figured in the post, the sacrificing couple who submit themselves to forms of violence that are no less symbolic—in which, moreover, there is no question of blood.

2. The Putting to Death of the Victim

Once the post has been put in place, the adhvaryu takes a cord comprised of three blades of grass, which was prepared at the outset, and divides it into three parts. He winds (in the correct direction) the median part three times superposed around the middle of the post, which is at the height of the sacrificer's navel; he cannot move this triple bond without bringing harm to the sacrificer. But of course the texts vary its position according to the officiant or sacrificer's wishes (Schwab 1886, 73). The identification of the yajamāna with the post is, in any case, underscored, as is their equal height (TS 6.3.4.5). The other two parts of the grass cord are placed one on the other, the largest on the smallest, in such a way as not to hang loosely (which indicates that one end of the cord is thicker than the other). The svaru is then fixed under one, or all three, of the turns of the cincture in a position that is parallel to the angle of the yūpa that faces the fire.

The animal (by the general rule a goat) is bathed and conducted in a southern direction between the uttara-vedi (seat of the oblation fire) and the post, and then positioned at a certain distance to the east of the yūpa where it faces west. It is thus outside the vedi, but looks toward it.[13] The adhvaryu then takes a cord comprised of two blades

[13]It is here that a new fire, which is to be added to the āhavanīya on the uttara-vedi, is kindled by friction.

of grass and cleans the animal's foreleg that is placed to the south of the vedi (thus the left leg) with this cord (he had likewise wiped the post with the triple-stranded cord before cincturing the post with it); then he winds the cord around the same leg, around the neck, and several times around the right horn before tying the upper end of the cord to the post (or even to the three-stranded cincture) in such a way that the animal would either be facing the post with its head to the west, or to the left of the post and turned toward the west, or beside the post and facing north (Schwab 1886, 81). Finally the goat is sprinkled with consecrated water and given some of it to drink. The gods are solemnly invited to the sacrifice through the mediation of Agni. With clarified butter, the adhvaryu first anoints the victim and then the libation spoon. Then follows a series of solemn rites that dramatize the sacrifice: the summoning of the priests by the adhvaryu, libations of clarified butter.

Strictly speaking the sacrifice begins with eleven preliminary fire libations (*prayājas*) to the gods of the sacrifice (the logs, strewn grass, fire, etc.). At the eleventh oblation, the adhvaryu takes the svaru (put earlier in the cord around the post) and the double-edged knife, dips the svaru in the butter remaining in the libation spoon of the eleventh prayāja, and passes one blade of the knife over the spoon's front lip. Then he goes to anoint the animal between its horns with these two instruments while asking them to protect it, and holds the knife out to the executioner, exhorting him to take note of the blade that had been anointed with clarified butter. This blade will be reserved for carving the cooked meat, while the other side will serve to joint the animal after it has been slain.[14]

[14]The symbolism is clear: the svaru, which is the post-sacrificer's post or weapon, and the knife are the two instruments of destruction; the adhvaryu consecrates them and makes use of them to touch the animal. It is a question of the real putting to death, the one that counts. The executioner will then do the work, just as, at the outset, the adhvaryu strikes the first axe blow against the tree trunk (or more exactly on the blade of grass that he puts on the tree) before passing the instrument on to the carpenter. The texts are neither clear nor unanimous on the identity of the executioner. It is around the carving of the animal and the distribution of its portions that discussions are most explicit, and give an idea of the executioner and his functions (cf. Schwab 1886, 125-26). The ritual just described supposes an executioner distinct from the adhvaryu and the other officiants as the one to whom the putting to death and the jointing are confided. It is difficult to accept that any of the priests would have assumed the function of śamitar, or moreover of the other ritual functions, and that the term *śamitar* did not designate a defined personage, like *adhvaryu* or *hotar* (KātyŚS 6.7.2-3, cited by Schwab ibid.). However, TaiB 7.1 (31.1) specifies what the śamitar should receive in the distribution of the portions of the meat, but adds that he must give this portion to a Brāhman if he is not a Brāhman himself. Such a comment—unique and late—is probably not to be taken literally. The very question betrays a veritable predicament for the Vedic authors, and a certain wavering in the practice of their time. Can one resolve the question by supposing, like Schwab, that the adhvaryu and the śamitar were originally one and the same person, and that the development of the ritual led to this greater specialization? Whatever the undeniable complexity of the Vedic solemn ritual and the long period of elaboration that it implies, it does not seem that the necessities of specialization alone would have led to the separation between the executioner and the main officiant. One could as well conceive of a subordinate priest committed to the butcher's function. The śamitar is nowhere recognized as an officiant, notwithstanding the statement to the contrary by Malamoud (1975b, 100), who no doubt refers to the confused discussion of MīS 3.7.28-29 rather than the ritual texts. Moreover, like the carpenter, the śamitar is not admitted to the interior of the vedi. It was probably necessary to recruit him soon enough from the lower castes. It is in any case what the actual practice would indicate, and it is worthwhile to observe the beginning of this movement in the Vedic literature itself. Further, what is to be said of the śūdra with his water pot who immediately follows the sacrificer when he carries the soma and precedes the hotar and brahman in the processional entrance of King Soma (Caland and Henry 1906, 54)? It seems

The adhvaryu then puts the svaru back in the belt that circles the post (Schwab 1886, 96).

Then another fire is prepared to the north outside the vedi: the *śāmitra* or executioner's fire, upon which the meat will be cooked. A brand is taken from the fire of the uttara-vedi by one of the officiants who proceeds successively around the animal, the site of the śāmitra, the purificatory pit (*cātvāla*),[15] the post, the āhavanīya (of the uttara-vedi), and the receptacles containing clarified butter, tracing circles around them with the firebrand before placing the latter on the uttara-vedi. During this time, the adhvaryu will have made new libations and another officiant will have taken embers from the first gārhapatya fire[16] to form the śāmitra. One of the libations is addressed to Paśupati. After having laid down his firebrand, the same officiant will again go around the same objects, but from right to left, that is, in the opposite direction of the pradakṣiṇā, sometimes even reversing the order of the objects.[17]

The putting to death of the animal is obviously the culminating moment of the sacrificial drama, when ritual actions and prayers are multiplied and the sacrificer and officiants' major concern is to preserve themselves from any kind of defilement. The adhvaryu unties the animal, whom the executioner must henceforth hold,[18] and he

indeed that in the sacrifice there would have been a necessary association between the higher varnas and the non-twiceborn castes. A fine theme for meditation.

[15]The cātvāla is the hole from which one draws earth for the uttara-vedi, and which is used for purifications. It is situated outside the vedi and to the north.

[16]To visualize the situation, one can refer to the plan in Caland and Henry 1906, pl. 4 (end of vol. 1) for the soma sacrifice, which, mutatis mutandis, provides an idea of the sacrificial site. When the āhavanīya is partially transferred to the uttara-vedi for the animal sacrifice, the first āhavanīya serves henceforth as the gārhapatya or "domestic fire." The original gārhapatya (from which the two other fires, the āhavanīya and daksina, have been drawn) becomes the "old gārhapatya."

[17]The idea is obviously to trace a protective (or separating?) circle around these particularly vulnerable (or dangerous?) objects, since they are associated with killing, and then for the officiant to disengage himself from the "infernal" circle thus created. Such an interpretation recalls the notations of Indian ritualists for whom it is a matter of protecting the ensemble from *raksas*. It is nonetheless not the only interpretation, nor perhaps the most profound, and Malamoud (1975b, 105 and n. 53) is no doubt right to see in it the symbol of an initial cooking of the victim, although the circumambulation with the firebrand includes more than just the animal. Yet he does not take into account the three turns made in the opposite direction by the priest who carries the brand, retracing the course he had just followed. Moreover, an obvious parallel can be drawn with the moment in the funeral rite in which the principal mourner walks around the pyre with a pierced water pot on his shoulder, thereby encircling the pyre and the burning corpse with a protective wall of water, and then retracing his steps in the opposite direction so as not to remain within this impregnable area. The only difference is the inversion of the direction of the movements: one begins by turning in the opposite direction of the pradakṣinā, and then reverts to the proper direction. A number of inversions of this type characterize the passage from a sacrifice to the gods to the funerary sacrifice.

[18]The post thus had only a symbolic function in the period of grand codified Vedic rituals: it is not the place where the animal is effectively put to death, but where it is attached to signify its complete submission to its destiny (leg tethered, head immobilized and probably lowered). Cf. Whitehead's photo (1921, facing p. 50) depicting a buffalo attached to the sacrificial post, its right foreleg tied and the neck stretched to receive the blade. The whole scene gives a rough idea of the Vedic enactment. The symbolic aspect probably disappeared from conscious memory to the extent that the post found an actual function. But Vedic ritual perhaps underwent a less refined phase when, without the fear of bloodshed, the post kept its function. Cf. H.-P. Schmidt 1973, 37.

touches it with the spits that will be used for roasting the *vapā,* as well as with a branch of *plakṣa* (*Ficus racemosa,* Linn.) and two blades of grass that he has already used to touch the animal before binding it.[19] The sacrificer then takes hold of these implements with both hands. The same officiant who has just carried the firebrand he had put on the uttara-vedi now leaves the sacrificial area preceding the animal; the adhvaryu and the sacrificer follow. After the brand is deposited in the śāmitra, everyone heads north. The wish is made that the animal's feet will go to the north (the direction of celestial destinies) and its senses to the elements; the adhvaryu, casting one of the blades of grass on the ground, entreats it to protect the animal's fall. He positions the latter toward the north with its head turned west, and instructs the executioner to slay it so that it makes no sound, and to announce its fall. All turn their backs to the victim, reenter the sacrificial area, and gather facing south opposite the clotted butter that had been prepared for the victim's cooking. The *hotar* gives instructions to the executioner for the jointing, while a hole is dug to bury the animal's excrement (Schwab 1886, 100-106).

The animal is put to death by suffocation or strangulation.[20] When the executioner has announced its death, the adhvaryu offers an oblation on the uttara-vedi and the other priests again face north. The adhvaryu, who bears the spits, and the yajamāna, whose hands are posed on the same spits, approach the victim, whom the executioner then unties (apparently it had been detached from the post without having been unbound). While releasing the animal, the adhvaryu at the same time releases the bond of sin of the sacrificer who has had the animal put to death. The adhvaryu takes the cord with one of the spits and places it in the cātvāla. The sacrificer's wife comes to pour water over it by way of purification, while the other officiants wash themselves at the cātvāla (according to others, everyone touches the water; the idea is the same). Water is also poured over the animal.

The adhvaryu must then extract the "omentum." To this end he places the other blade of grass lengthwise at the desired place on the goat's body so as to protect it, and then enjoins the knife to do it no harm. He makes a transversal incision with the unconsecrated edge (see above) over the blade of grass until blood appears. The blade of grass is thus cut in two. Taking the pointed upper end in his left hand, he dips the other piece with his right hand in the blood, and then either throws it to the west or onto the rubbish heap (*utkara*) as an offering to the rakṣas, whom he repulses far away (Schwab 1986, 111-12).

It is again the adhvaryu who extracts the vapā—omentum—with his hands. He washes and removes what adheres to it, extirpating it completely. The executioner must then cover the wound with his two hands until the omentum offering has been made. The

[19]Once again, the act of touching the victim with the spits signifies that the adhvaryu symbolically assumes the task of cooking the meat, although he leaves this for others to do. The very leafy plaksa branch has rather an appeasing role, while the blades of grass would be the symbolic mediation that preserves the animal from harm (as with the tree felled at the outset).

[20]Schwab refers here to Haug, *Aitareya brahmanam of the Rigveda* 2, 85, n. 11, who mentions a third form of putting to death by torsion of the testicles. The latter seems to be known in modern times. Cf. Biardeau 1971-72, 35, where the executioners are potters but the Brāhmans take charge of the jointing. Is this information reliable? Schwab, in any case, without finding anything similar in the texts, thinks that nothing would exclude it (1886, 106-7).

officiant who had earlier carried the firebrand goes to retrieve it from the śāmitra and, with the adhvaryu and the sacrificer, proceeds to the uttara-vedi. The adhvaryu carries the vapā with the two spits, which the sacrificer continues to hold with his hands. The brand is cast into the flames of the āhavanīya, while the adhvaryu holds the vapā above the coals at the edge of the fire and casts into the flames the upper end of the blade of grass that he had kept in his hand (see above). The blade of grass is still the mediator that must attenuate the burning of the vapā, but its definitive destruction could mark the achievement of the most delicate phase of the sacrifice, like the returning of the firebrand to its original place. The adhvaryu passes the vapā (between the yūpa and the uttara-vedi) to another officiant, who then roasts it over the fire while the adhvaryu bastes it with clarified butter. Drops of fat fall from the vapā into the fire. When the vapā has taken on a white color, the adhvaryu bastes it with unconsecrated butter and again takes it with the spits between the post and the uttara-vedi to deposit it south of the vedi on the plakṣa branch; then he draws out the spits. Thereafter, the vapā, having been put in the libation spoon between two small pieces of gold and basted with butter, is offered to Indra and Agni in the āhavanīya. The yajamāna wishes that he will obtain force—*indriya*—from it. Everyone then goes to purify themselves at the cātvāla. It is the executioner who will roast the meat on the śāmitra after having jointed the animal.

Insofar as the remainder of the ritual adds nothing pertinent to the matter in question, let us then retain from this all-too-brief evocation of the Vedic blood sacrifice the following points:

—*The close relationship between the post and the yajamāna*. This is marked, first, by the frequency with which the yajamāna serves to measure the yūpa between its base and upper tenon. It is equally probable that the three-stranded cincture of grass that the post receives at the moment of its elevation reproduces the cincture that the sacrificer and his wife receive at the moment of the *dīkṣā* (Caland and Henry 1906, 17-18): the former must be fixed either at the mid-height of the post, or at the level of the yajamāna's navel, and any deviation from this norm would bring harmful repercussions upon the sacrificer.

—At the same time, *the post must be considered as first victim:* the precautions taken when felling the tree, the entreaties addressed to it as well as to the post, already evoke those that surround the putting to death of the animal; it should not cause harm, one must not harm it. In the entreaties the post takes on cosmic dimensions, since its top touches the sky and the dwelling place of Viṣṇu. Just as one assures the animal it will have the highest destinies, so a superabundant "rebirth" is promised the tree, and both are signs of great prosperity here below and in the other world for the yajamāna. This victim role that the tree and post assume by virtue of having been sacrificed does not contradict an identification with the sacrificer: the real victim of every sacrifice is known to be the sacrificer, while anything else remains only a substitute.[21] The idea that associates the post with putting to death is inseparable from that of the post's fecundity, and the very particular form of the top of the post is meant to reproduce the sexual act. In the ritual of the post's erection, the caṣāla is penetrated by the tenon just as the yoni in

[21]For Vedic references on this identification, see Lévi 1966, 130 ff.

Śiva temples will later be penetrated by the liṅga. In each case, the emergent part of the tenon and the liṅga find themselves in a fecundating position; thanks to the caṣāla and yoni, the post moves into a universe transformed into a cosmos, just as the liṅga inhabits a garbhagṛha.

—*The configuration of the post and the uttara-vedi, seat of the āhavanīya,* is where the relation between the post and the sacrificer still comes to light. The side of the post that faces the fire receives a particular treatment: it is anointed with clarified butter by the adhvaryu using the libation spoon. Such butter is also used for the consecration of the tree to be felled and the victim to be slain, but also to feed the fire and nourish the gods. According to some texts, a chip detached from the post at the time of its hewing is also tossed into the āhavanīya fire when one adds to it a new fire created by friction (with its sexual connotation). The link between them is again marked at various moments of the ritual by the utilization of gold, which is fire in a solid state, as well as a symbol of wealth. The adhvaryu is provided with a piece of gold when the tree is felled; he deposits a little gold in the hole into which the yūpa is placed; he offers the vapā into the fire between two small pieces of gold; and some butter libations are made with a fragment of gold attached to the spoon in such a way that the butter flows over the gold. Although the sacrificer would subsequently recuperate a good part of this gold, it certainly has oblatory value, and could be the "victim" aspect of the sacrificial fire who is, moreover, the god Agni, the mouth of the gods. In addition, the narrow space between the post and the uttara-vedi is where movements of the officiants who deal with the animal victim take place.

This depiction of the nerve center of the sacrifice is, however, not complete without the śāmitra and the real place of the putting to death. One separates from the sacrificial space properly speaking the manipulations that are too dangerous or impure (the two adjectives can at this level be viewed as practically synonymous). The back and forth movements of the firebrand between the āhavanīya and the śāmitra indicate the link between this first zone outside the consecrated area and the sacrificial fire, but the śāmitra in itself is only an extension of the domestic fire. Around it the executioner is occupied with the duties delegated to him by the adhvaryu, and thus by the sacrificer. Consequently, it is there too that contact between the participants in the sacrifice and the outside world of man is effected, a contact that calls to mind the conditions of profane life, where inevitably superior and inferior, pure and impure, mix.

—*The symbolic function of the post.* There is some difficulty in conceiving that an instrument which demands such a complex ritual and is made the object of so many concerns finally serves no practical purpose. One must, however, yield to the evidence. Whatever conception one might posit of its anterior evolution—must one necessarily assume that the yūpa was at first a killing post?[22]—it is a fact that the post's sole

[22]The question is finally of the same order as that of human sacrifice: do the mythical sacrifice of the cosmic Puruṣa, the sacrificer conceived of as the real victim, and the texts relating to human sacrifices, to man as one of the five *paśus*, oblige one to posit human sacrifice "at the origin"? It is an idle question, since the information is insufficient, and one will be wary of responding to it. However, I see no difficulty in considering that we find ourselves in a symbolic universe from the start. The idea of human sacrifice normally arises in a conception of sacrifice where the sacrificer is the real victim. One will see below that later facts suggest an exactly contrary evolutionary schema, but that does not make a different primary phase impossible.

function is to make the animal a sacrificial victim, to mime its total submission to the divine order that transmutes it into food for the gods in the promise of riches and happiness for man. The manner in which the animal is attached to the post, with its foreleg, neck, and horn bound in an unquestionably discomforting and immobilizing position, makes the post more than just an instrument of torture: it is the representative of the yajamāna and the gods between whom the transaction is effected. And this transaction requires complete acquiescence from the victim in order for it to be beneficial to both the yajamāna and the gods. Nonetheless, it remains symbolically the instrument of torture, which the svaru in particular signifies: the miniature mobile yūpa that the adhvaryu dips into the clarified butter at the same time as the blade of the knife, to then touch the animal with it between its horns.

If, on the other hand, one recalls that everything that takes place in the sacrificial area belongs to the world of the gods (*devayajanam*), then the post, situated half inside and half outside, is only half deified (the side of it turned toward the fire). The animal, which is bound from the side exterior to the vedi, is not deified while alive (the butter that the svaru and the knife on the head deposit on it mark its ritual death at the same time as its consecration). But it is put into rapport with the world of the gods by the mediation of the post, which is in this way once again the symbolic intermediary in the transaction between men and gods. In relation to everything that is situated on the vedi, the post has, if one dares to say so, an inferior status, but it nonetheless occupies an indispensable and pivotal position.

Finally, it is evident that a function which is already symbolic in the Vedic literature predisposes the yūpa to be a catalyst of speculations, of mythic and ritual transformations having several dimensions.

B. The Śamī and the Kindling Sticks

It is the similarity in form between Pōtu Rāju and the yūpa that has led to the study of the latter in its Vedic ritual setting. A symbolic instrument of putting to death crowned by a kind of capital that doubles this function and adds to it a sexual connotation as much by its form as by the fruits expected of it, it remains above all this nerve center, half within and half without the sacrificial area, that defines where the impurity of death is integrated into the sacrifice without defiling it. But the wood of which Pōtu Rāju is fashioned, from the śamī tree, is not alluded to in the texts that prescribe the type of wood to be used for the Vedic post. Another symbolism is thus added to the first, and it would be equally vain to imagine it would be simple and that the *śruti* would provide us with its absolute origin.

The śamī is essentially linked with the production of sacrificial fire by friction, but in a quite obscure manner since, once again, it is nonfunctional and purely symbolic.[23] The post, as was seen, is ritually inseparable from the fire of the uttara-vedi, the

[23]The symbolism of the śamī may appear twofold, but one will see that it is reducible to a unity. See below, 58ff.

offering fire proper to the animal sacrifice. One may thus anticipate a certain logic in the association between the post and the sacrificial fire in one and the same object. The wood chip from the post that is cast into the newly established fire on the uttara-vedi (see above, p. 46) is called *adhimanthana-śakala,* "the churning chip." The root *math-* (or *manth-*), "to churn," is employed alone or in compounds to designate friction caused by the rotation of two pieces of wood, the *araṇis*, that produce fire.[24] This wood chip that is removed from the post would then be the part of the post that contributes to the kindling of the fire. It would thus be its symbolic churn, renewable for every sacrifice, as distinct from the araṇis.

Let us take as our starting point the ritual installation of the fires, such as it is described at the beginning of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and again in the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra*. The difficulty with these texts, especially the former, is that they mix almost inextricably two moments of the same ritual: the gathering of all the objects required for the rite at the sacrificial site, and the kindling of the fire with the araṇis. The latter is mentioned almost by paraleipsis (TaiB 1.1.9.1): "He churns the fire from (that wood which is) the embryo of the śamī (*śamīgarbha*—that is, aśvattha wood, from which the araṇis are made), for that is the form of fire suitable for sacrifice."[25] Sāyaṇa's commentary clearly states that *śamīgarbha* designates the araṇi made of aśvattha that grows out of a śamī tree. But his gloss is ambiguous since the term *araṇi* is singular, and the ablative *śamīgarbhāt* in the text upon which he comments could indicate the "father," that is the "male" araṇi, the vertical component (see below?) that "churns" the fire in the female araṇi. The symbolism of the śamī has already been expressed once earlier in the same Brāhmaṇa in a passage that comes to be widely recalled (1.1.3.11-12): "Prajāpati emitted fire. He feared that it would burn him. He appeased it (*aśamayat*) with the śamī. That is what makes the śamī the śamī it is. There is, therefore, this ingredient made of śamī that serves to appease, to prevent fire from burning further."[26] The śamī in question here, amid other species of trees, is a part of the fuel that will feed the fire, and not directly related to the kindling sticks. Somewhat further on, at 1.1.5.7-8, it is said that Prajāpati divided the fire into three (the three principal fires of the solemn sacrifice) in order to control its exceedingly great strength, and the same terms are employed again: *śantyā apradāhāya*. Two conclusions can already be drawn: the sacrificial fire is formidable and there must be a means of controlling it and limiting its power; and when the śamī is associated with the aśvattha, in a way yet to be specified, it is with a view to making the araṇis—implements that produce fire so well because they contain it, and can thus be dangerous.

It is the first chapter of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* that, according to Sāyaṇa, deals with the installation of the fires. The next chapter only supplements the formulae of the first. It is there that the description of the ritual given in the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* weighs

[24]Cf. RS 3.29.1-2 where *adhimanthana* figures not far from *araṇi* (in the dual). Trans. Renou EVP XII, p. 69. We will soon meet this text again. *Adhimanthana* is translated as "the support for the friction (of the fire)."

[25]*śamīgarbhād agnim manthati/ eṣā vā agner yajñiyā tanūḥ.*

[26]*prajāpatir agnim asṛjata/ so'bibhet pra mā dhakṣyatīti/ taṃ śamyāśamayat/ tacchamyai śamitvam/ tacchamīmayaḥ sambhāro bhavati/ śāntyā apradāhāya iti.*

in. First, however, TaiB 1.2.1.6-7 cites again a series of formulae that accompany the gathering of the ingredients. The one that concerns us relates to the śamī, but those that follow show clearly that it is not yet a question of the araṇis but still a matter of fuel. It is basically a repetition of TaiB 1.1.9.1: "This śamī thanks to which Prajāpati appeased—*aśamayat*—your weapon (: your flame), I bring to you the fire he just emitted, so that it not burn too greatly, for appeasement."[27] A little later comes the formula that announces the making of the fire (1.2.1.8): "I bring this form of the fire proper to the sacrifice (the araṇi), born of the aśvattha bearer of oblations, this embryo of the śamī whose womb is appeased—*śāntayoni*—in order to produce fire,"[28] immediately followed by (8-9): "This aśvattha embryo of the śamī that has grown with you, I bring it to you with the formula and the insignia of the sacrifice."[29] The aśvattha also belongs to the fuel one collects to feed the fire, but if that were the matter in question, would one mention that it is śamīgarbha, "born of the śamī"?

The *Āpastamba Śrautasutra* resolves the question: the chapter on the installation of the fires (5.1.2) begins with the last quotation from the TaiB, but supplements it thus: "This aśvattha embryo of the śamī that has grown with you, I bring it to you with the formula and the insignia of the sacrifice. Saying that, (the sacrificer) brings the two araṇis of aśvattha born of the śamī (*śamīgarbha*)."[30] Sāyaṇa approves of this addition, without which, he says, one would not understand the invocation.[31] In any case, at the level of the sūtras, it is clear that the two araṇis are made of aśvattha, from the same wood, and that this wood is associated with the śamī. Then, inverting the order of the mantras, Āpastamba introduces the text of TaiB 1.2.1.8 that immediately precedes it, and according to which the aśvattha *śamīgarbha* "has an appeased womb" or "is appeased in its womb" (*śāntayoni*), conforming to the customary signification of the śamī in association with the fire. Changing the place of the mantra in this way relates it directly to the araṇis and clarifies the passage in the Brāhmaṇa. Sāyaṇa gives an idea of the concrete manner in which the symbiosis between the aśvattha and the śamī is to be conceived: "*śamīgarbham,* that is to say, in as much as the araṇi is made from an aśvattha tree encompassed by a śamī tree (*śamīvṛkṣaveṣṭita*)." It is more than probable, as will soon be shown, that this must be very concretely imagined as a pipal—another name of the aśvattha which frequent connection with Pōtu Rāju has made familiar to us—that grows out of, or on, a śamī. But how did the Vedic authors represent the recommended schema? The texts are surprising in their succinctness or terseness, and it is the much later commentaries that make a point of providing a somewhat more concrete content to the brief indications. Is this not typical of this entire learned literature, which codifies what is otherwise known and is endlessly meticulous regarding

[27]*yayā te srṣtasyāgneḥ/ hetim aśamayat prajāpatiḥ/ tām imām apradāhāya/ śamīm śāntyai harāmyaham.*

[28]*aśvatthāddhavyavāhāddhi jātām/ agnes tanūm yajñiyām sambharāmi/ śāntayonim śamīgarbham/ agnaye prajanayitave.*

[29]*yo aśvatthaḥ śamīgarbhaḥ// āruroha tve sacā/ tam te harāmi brahmaṇā/ yajñiyaiḥ ketubhiḥ saha.*

[30]ĀpŚS 5.1.2: . . . *iti śamīgarbhasyāśvatthasyāraṇī āharati.*

[31]A doubt remains concerning the *tve sacā*. Caland 1921, 130 understands "with you, kindling stick." Sāyana gives an adverbial value to *sacā* and glosses *tve* with *tvadartham*: it is to provide the araṇis that the aśvattha has grown in or with the śamī.

details of ritual, such that one wonders if they were ever observed (considering that substitutes were suggested for them), but which leaves entire sections of information, that would be invaluable *for us,* in obscurity? In fact, opinions regarding this aśvattha *śamīgarbha* diverged.[32] Some thought one could take just any aśvattha, since the śamī was in reality the earth. But this interpretation has more of value than blind literalism: one had to maintain the śamī-pipal association no matter what. Others debated whether the roots of an aśvattha grown out of the śamī must or must not touch the ground, which implies that one would indeed have known cases of such a concrete juxtaposition appearing in "nature,"[33] and that these "couples" had a well-defined ritual utilization.

The myth of Purūravas and Urvaśī, given in ŚPB 11.5.1ff., also makes use of the śamī-aśvattha complementarity when Purūravas, who attempts to recover his vanished wife, takes a fire contained in a pan to the forest (ibid., 13). After having left, he returns: the fire has become aśvattha, the pan śamī. The ritualists' interpretation is first that one must make two araṇis, of which the upper will be of aśvattha and the lower of śamī. But the solution accepted as correct is that the two araṇis should be of aśvattha.[34] No doubt one has here the already very laborious employment of a series of formulae, given in TS 1.3.7, connected with the kindling of the sacrificial fire, a sequence that is itself not clear:[35] one of the araṇis is identified as Urvaśī, the other as Purūravas, and their union brings forth Āyus, the personification of the duration of mortal life. That it may be ample is one of the most frequently expressed wishes of the yajamāna in the course of a solemn sacrifice. There is no question of the wood of which the araṇis are made, but the sexual relationship that unites the two is in itself noteworthy because the "churning" of the fire was not always conceived in this manner, as one can see from the cursory notations in the ṚS on the "mothers" of the fire, which are the two araṇis. They are thus named in RS 10.115.1 (trans. Renou, EVP 14, p. 26), whereas 3.29.1-2, while assimilating the making of fire by kindling sticks to a birth, compares the two araṇis to *garbhiṇī*s (trans. idem, 12, p. 69): "Here then is the support for the friction (of the fire), here is the instrument for engendering (the fire) ready (to function); bring here the Lady of the tribe (the kindling stick). We shall churn out Agni in the ancient manner. Jātavedas [= Agni] has been put into the two (female pieces, the kindling sticks),[36] well held (like) the embryo by the (women) bearing embryos.[37]

[32]Caland 1921 brings together a number of references in the notes of his translation of ĀpSS 5.1.2-3 (vol. 1, 130-131).

[33]The Monier-Williams dictionary, s.v. śamī, explains *śamīgarbha* as designating the aśvattha "which takes root in the fissures of other trees." In fact one sees the pipal growing from the crevices of walls.

[34]Cf. the development given in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (4.34-94) of this myth of origin of the aranis: Purūravas, having left a pan containing fire in the forest, returns in search of it and finds in its place an asvattha *śamīgarbha* (85), from which he decides to make an araṇi (singular, but that must represent the pair) to produce the fire into which he will offer oblations. One notes in this myth that the aśvattha *śamīgarbha* comes from the forest to be introduced into the sacrifice.

[35]Cf. Keith 1967, vol. 1, 42 n. 3.

[36]It seems that the parenthesis should have been closed after "female," for "kindling sticks" translates *aranyoh,* which figures in the text.

[37]Other references, where the same observation is valid, include RS 5.9.3 (EVP 13, 25), 7.1.1 (EVP 13, 51).

One therefore distinguishes in the śruti (and in the sūtras) two distinct and doubtlessly concomitant complementarities: one that unites the śamī with the aśvattha, making one the mother of the other, and the more complex and less stable complementarity that unites the two kindling sticks (the feminine word is generally employed in the dual) with the fire itself, as well as with each other. The son of the śamī forms the material of the "mothers" of fire. If one refers as well to the myth of Purūravas and Urvaśī, one observes that the two araṇis form a couple;[38] the lower araṇi, female, with a cavity and placed horizontally on the ground, and the upper araṇi, male, provided with (if not formed of) a vertical piece with round section and ending in a point. The upper araṇi is rapidly turned in the lower cavity to produce fire by friction. It is obvious that the two "mothers" of fire were very soon perceived as being united by a relationship of a sexual nature in which the two partners were male and female. The interplay of these two complementarities, which could scarcely evolve independently of each other, produced the most curious variants. While the brahmanic norm continues to assert that the two araṇis must be of aśvattha wood, the āgamic derivatives of the Vedic ritual already knew to conserve something of the interplay. *Īsānaśivagurudevapaddhati* 1.77 (vol.1, p. 64) clearly states that the araṇis must be hewn of aśvattha that grew from a śamī—*śamy-udgatāśvatthajā*. The *Mṛgendrāgama (kriyā* 6.57a), less precise, says that the lower araṇi is *śamījāsvatthajā,* which permitted commentators to understand that it was "born of śamī or aśvattha." And what is there to say about the *Ajitāgama* (*kriyā* 133), which speaks of a *śamyaśvatthatarūdbhavā* araṇi, or about the *Kiraṇāgama* (2.4.2) cited by the editor of the *Ajita* (ibid.), which further aggravates the ambiguity by stating *śamīpippala-garbhotthāṃ kalpayed araṇīm*? One no longer knows what *śamīpippalagarbha* would signify in the compound qualifying the araṇi, but it is at least evident that *śamī* and *pippala* determine *garbha* in the same respect, and that there can no longer be any question of an aśvattha born in a śamī.[39] It is thus not surprising that nineteenth-century western Indology would have echoed practices and information that were more or less "aberrant."

H. H. Wilson ([1850-88] 1977) thus annotates his translation of ṚS 10.31.10 (vol. 6, 86 n. 1) as follows: "The sterile cow is the śamī tree that gives birth to the aśvattha; from the wood of these two trees is made the araṇis, the pieces of wood that are rubbed against each other to produce the sacred fire, the upper, harder piece is made of śamī, the lower, softer, is of aśvattha." One does not see how the śamī becomes male. Oppert ([1893] 1972) is less committal when he asserts: "the sacred fire is produced by rubbing a stick from the aśvattha against a branch taken from a śamī." As for Crooke, his information seems to have varied. In 1894 (1968, vol. 2, 106-7), he writes: "The khair, or Mimosa, seems to owe the esteem in which it is held to its use in the production of

[38]One will continue to speak of the two araṇis because symbolically it is the duality that is retained, but the kindling-woods are more complex. They comprise five parts all together. Cf. Renou (1954, 19, s.v. araṇi, and the photographs of modern araṇis in Caland and Henry 1906, 1, pl. 1 [Haug collection]—on the same plate is the photograph of an *ulūkhala*, of an inwardly curved mortar for ritual use). On the other hand, classical Sanskrit metaphorically employs *araṇi* to designate a human mother.

[39]I thank my colleague and friend Hélène Brunner, research scholar at the CNRS, for these references to the Āgamas which she spontaneously collected for me.

the ritual fire. Because of its hardness, it forms the base of the araṇi or sacrificial kindling-wood, and the end of the softer pipal is inserted into it to make the fire. The yūpa, or sacrificial post to which the victim was attached, was often made of this wood." A little further on he describes the "modern" araṇi (singular) of five parts and specifies that the lower araṇi is made of khair or khadira wood and provided with two cavities: one into which the point of the upper drilling-wood is inserted; the other, called yoni, very near, where one gathers a small quantity of highly inflammable tinder upon which fall the sparks. Again one sees how the disposition of the two araṇis is not directly perceived as the analogue of a sexual union, since it is the cavity where the fire will rise that is called *yoni*, "womb." It is no longer a question of śamī, which has been replaced by khadira (another kind of acacia), which Crooke knows was recommended for making the Vedic yūpa. On the contrary, in 1896 (1974, vol. 1, 33; cf. 30 n. 1), he reproduces textually the notes of two brahmans from the northeast: "The base is formed of śamī wood. . . . A small cavity is made in this block which symbolizes the feminine principle (*śakti yoni*). The intermediate araṇi is a stem . . . at the end of which one affixes an iron nail as a pivot. The upper araṇi, a piece of flat wood, rests on this nail while two priests hold the lower araṇis. The point of the stem upon which the string is wound in order to turn it is called *deva yoni* . . . etc." All mention of the pipal has disappeared, no doubt by omission, but the śamī replaces the khadira. Then again, the hole in which the upper drilling stick is inserted is indeed the yoni, and even the *śakti yoni*, "the womb of Śakti," dare we translate "of the Goddess," and this term is curiously opposed to *deva yoni*, "womb of the god" (Agni?). For the "couple" to have a meaning, it would be necessary that the two compounds *sakti-yoni* and *deva-yoni* be differentially interpreted. In the former case, it is indeed a question of the womb of Śakti, of the divinity in its female form, and one will see that the śamī has in the meantime become a form of the Goddess.[40] But *deva yoni* would have to be the womb from which the god Agni is born, the fire that the male araṇi produces by friction.

The most beautiful specimen of this type of variation is still that offered in the *Vedic Index* by Macdonell and Keith (1967, 2nd ed.), in which the rubric *araṇi* (dual) only appears in the *Addenda and Corrigenda* (vol. 2, 511) and describes the kindling-woods as follows: "The upper (*uttarā*) and the lower (*adharā*) are distinguished. The upper, in the form of a drill, is made of the hard wood of the Aśvattha, the lower, in the form of a slab, of the soft wood of the Śamī. . ."—a passage accompanied by references to the Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, including the TaiB, which say quite different things. Under the rubric *śamī* (2, 354), where the same schema is recalled, the authors refer notably to TS 5.1.9.6 and 5.4.7.4 and add "the lower of the two sticks." These passages from the TS, translated by Keith himself (1967, 2nd ed.), refer not to the araṇis, but to the *samidh*, that is to say, to pieces of wood with which the fire is fed. It is a matter of constructing the fire altar and one places on it seven sticks of four different kinds of wood: udumbara, aśvattha, vikaṅkata, and śamī (cf. ŚPB 9.2.3.37-40, where aśvattha

[40]For testimony from the same period, cf. Monier-Williams (1971, 2nd ed., 171): "The śamī or Acacia is a goddess in itself, and it is supposed that it contains fire"; Oppert ([1893], 1972, 455) gives Śamī as the name of one of the grāmadevatās cited by Vopadeva (a Bengali author from the second half of the thirteenth century). We shall return to this.

is omitted). The śamī receives no special treatment. One is justified in affirming that although the TS knows it (as distinct from the RS), it never mentions the śamī in connection with the araṇis or the lighting of the fire. The same observation can be made for the KS, which is also cited in the *Vedic Index*. On the other hand, the reference to AS 6.11.1 is more pertinent and expresses a symbolic situation analogous to that of TaiB, from which we started: "The aśvattha is mounted on the śamī (or: grew on the śamī), it is thus that a son has been engendered."[41] But the aśvattha is no longer śamīgarbha, it is the spouse, the impregnator. In the Indian context, where the father engenders only a second self, the passage from the one to the other is easy, but the metaphor indicates a clear acquaintance with the connection between the śamī and aśvattha for the production of fire, and the manner in which it is formulated gives room for an interpretation such as Macdonell and Keith's. But the AS does not employ, any more than the TaiB, the term *araṇi* in this context, and the relation between the śamī and the aśvattha *śamīgarbha* could lead to the hypothesis that the araṇis are made from two trees. ŚPB 9.5.1.6 settles the debate, as do the Sūtra literature and later commentaries. Thus, those whose profession was to study the texts contributed to the diffusion of variants that are without doubt not at all modern.[42]

These few examples suffice,[43] in any case, to show how a coalescence of two complementarities has come to pass in several ways. The very strong link that has since the beginning united the sacrificial post and the fire has even allowed that khadira wood be introduced in the making of the araṇis. Does not the *adhimanthana* chip, detached during the hewing of the post and then cast into the offering fire of the uttara-vedi (see above, p. 48), lend itself to such a shift inasmuch as its symbolism was not a dead letter? The diversity of regional or local situations—or the simple divergence of opinion among informants—is not necessarily to be taken as a sign of a tradition's degradation, even if the latter would have been real in the time of Crooke and Oppert. It is, one might say, "original," in the sense that a symbolic whole is by its very nature open to interpretation. What is true within brahmanic tradition strictly speaking can only be more true when one leaves this narrow circle of the "Vedic" sacrifice and its classic "agamic" substitutes.

The question that arises thus concerns the śamī's role in this context: why is it associated with the aśvattha prior to the fashioning of the araṇis? Given the text of the TaiB that prescribes it even while insisting on the "etymology" of the term *śamī*, one must be attentive to this aspect of the problem. Whatever the real etymology of *śamī* when the word denotes a tree, it is evident that the theologians were above all interested in everything that was evoked by the root *śam-*, which is as ambiguous as one could wish. Moreover, the term *śamī* exists in the RS, but with the single meaning of "effort,

[41] *Śamīm aśvattha ārūḍhas tatra puṃsuvanaṃ kṛtam.*

[42] These remarks obviously do not detract from the worth of these valuable indexes that our predecessors have left us. It is impossible to work today without referring to them. As so often, it is the tools with which we are furnished that we turn against.

[43] Let me only mention for the record Thurston 1907, 464: among the Nambūtiri Brāhmans, the marriage fire is made by the friction of wood from the pipal and jack-fruit trees.

toil," and more particularly "ritual effort,"[44] which would already suffice to charge it with numerous symbolic potentials. In fact, it appears to be there that the first meaning of *śam-* resides, "to make an effort, to weary oneself, to exhaust oneself," from which ensues the meaning "to be at rest" (following exhaustion), "to extinguish" (referring to fire), "to die" (the executioner of the Vedic sacrifice who immolates the victim is the *śamitar* or *śamayitar*); but also "to be appeased," from which comes the substantive *śānti*, "peace," with all its "worldly" and ascetic resonances. This deep ambiguity of the term joins the ambivalence of the sacrificial fire, the source of all prosperity, but also of mortal danger. On the one hand, by burning the offered substances or cooking the flesh of victims, it is associated with death, but also with the fecundity of sacrificial death. On the other hand, if it is not properly handled according to the rules, it can exceed the prescribed bounds and destroy what does not belong to it.[45] The śamī could thus furnish the symbolic counterpart to the flame of the fire. It has its beneficent potential. It is the source of what makes the flame rise for better or for worse. It is fire in its latent state. The śamī is thus an essentially ambivalent wood, like the fire, like the root *śam-* that its name evokes. But it is its latent power, its "nature" inclined to appeasement, including that of death, of extinction, which implies that it can exercise a symbolic control over fire, indeed reorient its action in a favorable direction.

To further clarify this symbolism, one must turn one's attention to the aśvattha, which may be assumed to be in part complementary, even if its "etymology" could have arisen independently of the śamī's. The wood of the aśvattha is used to make various sacrificial implements. One will note, however, that like the śamī it is excluded from the species of which the sacrificial post can be made, while its "etymology" invariably relates it to the fire, and it is not impossible that its utilization in the making of ritual paraphernalia would also be due to its rapport with fire. The complementarity between the two trees thus seems to be very deep. The theologians of the Brāhmaṇas, in fact, persistently return to the origin of the aśvattha as hidden sacrificial fire, with terms that are approximately the same for all occurrences of this very short mythic fragment. For example, TaiB 1.1.39: "Agni hid himself from the gods. Having taken the form of a horse, he remained one year in an aśvattha. That is what makes the aśvattha have the nature of an aśvattha."[46] The aśvattha is thus that in which the sacrificial fire, in the form of a horse (*aśva*), has stayed (*sthā*) for one year. This feature is constant: Agni hides himself from the gods in the form of a horse. This horse remains hidden for a year, just as the horse

[44]Cf. Renou EVP 4, 43 (RS 2.31.6d), 51 (3.55.3b), 90 (6.52.1b), who states (90) that "*yajñá/śámī* is a variation of *yajñá/adhvará*, the oral and material parts of the sacrifice." One recognizes in *adhvara* the term from which *adhvaryu* is derived, the name of the officiating priest who carries out the greater part of the ritual activities as prescribed by the Yajurveda. It is indeed to this Veda that the few śruti passages cited up to now refer, apart from the hymns in the RS. One can put in parentheses the only occurrence we have met of a *śamyām* that cannot be referred to *śámī* (see above, p. 55). It is almost certain that the two nuances of "appeasement" and "putting to death" suffice to account for the symbolic weight of the term *śamitar* or *śamayitar* ("executioner"). But that does not negate the etymological analyses made by Renou (1958, 57) and Minard (1956, 209a).

[45]The epic-purānic myths can be related to each of these possibilities. Cf. ŚPB 9.2.3.37, in which the śamī is already employed as fuel to calm a fire that frightens the gods.

[46]*agnir devebhyo nilāyata/ aśvo rūpaṃ kṛtvā/ so'śvatthe saṃvatsaram atiṣṭhat/ tad aśvatthasyāśvatthatvam.*

in the *aśvamedha* sacrifice wanders for a year: this horse-fire that hides itself for a year makes sacrifice impossible during the entire cycle of the liturgical year. Why the horse? It would be too hasty to answer that the aśvattha's name[47] must be justified. The horse is not just any animal. It is strongly marked: the royal animal, bellicose, spirited, fast as the wind or thought . . . and the main victim of the royal sacrifice par excellence, the aśvamedha with its great victories. Agni is a spirited and capricious horse and, even in his aśvattha form,[48] it is judicious to give him a source that renders him symbolically more amenable. It is, therefore, from this perspective that one must understand the significance of the śamī: it can extinguish fire, but it can also light fire to kill an enemy. We have seen (above, p. 49, n. 27) that the flame was the fire's weapon (*heti*), which reinforces the bellicose and royal register. The śamī can thus be drawn from the side of peace or from the side of victory by war, owing to its association with the fire, and it is entailed in the same symbolic complex, retaining in the pipal-fire its primacy as genetrix.

On the other hand, that it is a feminine word has evidently been of great import in the formation of a constellation of meanings around the śamī. Agni the horse is eminently male, and the femininity of the araṇis does not prevent the aśvattha, a robust tree with an enormous and straight trunk, from connoting masculinity. It is not surprising that the śamī would have greatly contributed to the formation of the araṇis as a couple, whose sexual union, represented by friction, "churning," would produce fire. It is in any case beyond doubt that in the myth of Purūravas and Urvaśī, it is the pipal and the śamī that form a couple, and not the araṇis, which accounts for the variations we have met regarding the material substance of the araṇis. Moreover, its role as genetrix recalls the ascetic value of śānti, of peace as an attribute of the Brahman dedicated to nonviolent works, to the Brahman as human representative of the *brahman*, in which the śruti recognizes the matrix of the kṣatra, those of warrior and princely descent.[49] However, one must also not be surprised to see it become a goddess. The

[47]For which, let it be said in passing, philologists are seeking a non-Indo-European etymology (KeWA s.v. aśvatthah).

[48]AS 3.6 has the aśvattha born of the khadira, and considers it to be the killer of the tree that bore it. It is invoked for the destruction of enemies. Is it by chance that the khadira, a wood from which the yūpa is made, is associated in an imprecatory manner with the aśvattha rather than the śamī?

[49]Let me yield to the temptation to make an incursion into the epic to see some of the śamī's effects in the classical mythology. One knows how the MBh makes use of the śamī in the famous episode of 4.5, in which the Pāṇḍavas conceal their weapons—the fire of the sacrifice of battle—in a thick śamī from which they suspend an apotropaic corpse (cf. Biardeau 1979 and 1981a). There is also an epic transformation of the story of Agni fleeing from the gods (MBh 13.85.23-45a; 84.22-43). First he sleeps in the depth of the waters, but, dislodged, he flees into an aśvattha tree; then, again discovered, he enters into a *śamīgarbha* (here no doubt "the womb of a śamī") with the desire to sleep there. The gods rejoin him there and Agni finally puts himself at their service. It is since then that one lights the ritual fire in the *śamīgarbhas*, whatever that means! But here I would like to return to the signification I proposed for the name Aśvatthāman (1978-79, 154), which I think can be improved. Rather than stressing the complementarity of father and son, of the warrior Brahmans Drona and Aśvatthāman (though that complementarity does exist), I would rather see a direct opposition of the names and statuses respectively of Aśvatthāman and Dhṛṣṭadyumna: *aśvatthāman*, if one tries to translate what the epic-poets wished to encode, is "he who possesses the aśvattha" (taking *-man* to be a scarcely disguised form of the suffix *-mant*), *i.e.* the *śamī*, which assures him primacy over Agni, a primacy he owes to his status as

aśvattha will not be deified to the same extent in later cults, even though it is a tree particularly charged with religious connotations (*Ficus religiosa*). But it has a clearly defined use in Vedic ritual, no doubt invested with symbolic meanings, but always linked to this use. The role of the śamī, for its part, is symbolic from the start, as is that of the sacrificial post, which, as noted, was no longer functional in Vedic ritual, if indeed it ever was. There seems to be a kind of law that destines objects to a symbolic development that is all the richer the less directly utilitarian they are to begin with. It would, on the contrary, be an error of perspective to see *systematically* in the purely symbolic presence of an object the survival of a more functional use that would have made it indispensable. Here more than ever let us recognize that we are in a domain in which symbolism prevails, in which the symbol as such is highly *functional,* although in a nonutilitarian sense.

Furthermore, one encounters in the Sūtras dealing with Vedic ritual an equivalence of the śamī with gold. For example, it is prescribed to make the oblatory spoon of the *Varuṇapraghāsa* either from śamī or from gold (notably ĀpŚS 8.5.29; for other references, cf. Caland 1969, 2nd ed., ibid., n. 1). Caland questions the meaning of this equivalence, for which no explanation is given, and compares it to the interpretation of *śamī* by *śamayati, śānti*. Another hypothesis can be proposed: the equivalence of gold and fire is a pan-Indian notion found in philosophical texts in which gold appears as the solid form of fire. It is probable that the linking of the metal and the flame is due not only to their comparable brilliance, but that each is a symbol of earthly prosperity: the sacrificial fire through the benefits it can produce; gold as a tangible sign of material wealth and beauty. Inasmuch as the śamī is assimilated to latent fire, since fire is itself called *śamīgarbha,*[50] it is thus also a substitute for gold. The same symbolism is thus at work, and if the śamī is of gold (to which "popular" tradition later abundantly testifies), it is indeed because it contains fire, and fire in an *appeased* form. Logically, the

a Brahman. Moreover, the śamī retains its full ambiguity in him; the Brahman is dedicated to peace—śānti—whereas he wants nothing but to kill Dhṛṣṭadyumna. One of the versions of his birth has him neigh like a horse, which is more royal and martial than brahmanic. Dhṛṣṭadyumna, for his part, is the incarnation of Agni, born of a sacrifice that his father, King Drupada, performed to obtain a son strong enough to kill the Brahman Droṇa (on the relations between Droṇa and Drupada, see Biardeau 1981b). Dhṛṣṭadyumna literally means "of insolent brightness," for one must ascribe to this fire its abusive character. Son of a father who refused aid to a Brahman (who shirked the services that a Kṣatriya has a right to expect from a Brahman), he dared to lay hands on Droṇa and ignominiously beheaded him at the moment when he was already dead by the power of his yoga (Droṇa had first killed Drupada in battle). Aśvatthāman will use the terrible face of his Brahman's power, or the baneful aspect of the śamī, to kill the murderer of his father, to kill Agni himself, this Agni who does not respect Brahmans and is thus unworthy to rule.

However, the same epic also knows a Brahman named Śamīka who preaches to his overly irascible son (born of a cow and called Śṛṅgin, "the Horned") the Brahman's duty of pardon and peace toward all, and more particularly toward the king who protects him and makes it possible for him to fulfil his duty (see MBh 1.41 [37]). Conversely, King Śāntanu perhaps owes his name to the fact that he had to take the place of his older brother, who had become an ascetic, on the throne, but he is in addition the father of Bhīṣma, the Kṣatriya who renounced his duties as a prince (to procreate, to reign) to allow his father to gratify his amorous desire.

[50]One will have occasion to speak again of the śamī in Tamilnadu, where its local name is *vaṉṉi-maram,* "tree of fire," the term *vaṉṉi* being understood as the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit *vahni*.

aśvattha that provides the araṇis and that is itself directly *śamīgarbha* ought to have played this role. But here again the śamī was symbolically first because its femininity related it to Śrī-Lakṣmī, who is also represented by gold. The choice between the two species was favored by the general movement that, no doubt early, led Hindus to distribute among male and female divinities goods attributable to the other world and to liberation, on the one hand, and, on the other, objects of more immediate enjoyment on this earth, such as health, progeny, and wealth.[51]

A question arises quite naturally at this point: do not the śamī-aśvattha schema and the concept of a sexual complementarity between the two araṇis, in which the male element evokes the form of the sacrificial post, mean that our detour by way of the yūpa and its infinitely more complex symbolism has been unnecessary? On the question of the little post-god made of śamī from which we set out, would not the simple consideration of the araṇis and their relation to the śamī have sufficed to "explain" the transformation of this ensemble into the Pōtu Rāju we know?

[51]One can "neglect" tantrism, in which the Goddess is the access to the Absolute, for the latter would not be comprehensible without the previous division into masculine and feminine.

III. The Post for the Buffalo Sacrifice in Orissa

To such a question, a response of a methodological nature, and thus one of principle, can already be given. In Vedic ritual, everything is done to make it impossible to dissociate the post from the oblation fire of the uttara-vedi, that is, from the fire connected with the immolation of the sacrificial animal. It would seem that there is a ritual totality here that could have been transposed as such. Were it simply a matter of a sacrificial fire kindled by the araṇis, one might think of the three fires of the solemn ritual, but then every animal victim would disappear. Pōtu Rāju's place in the cult of the Goddess associates him directly with the sacrificial animal, such that one imagines that, other than the buffalo sacrifice, offerings of goats and cocks are addressed to him, and to the Goddess only through his mediation. His own satisfaction entails that of the Goddess, who does not seem to have any particular hunger for meat.[1] Thus it would indeed seem that there is in the ritual complex presented by the grāmadevatās of Āndhra something that recalls the animal sacrifice of the Vedic ritual, and that the post that is Pōtu Rāju replaces from the latter both the yūpa and the oblation fire, which, for its part, has entirely disappeared, since the castes implicated in this cult would not know how to possess a fire that only Brahmans could serve. We shall soon see other confirmations of this presence of the yūpa in Pōtu Rāju in the details of the cult (cf. chapter 4).[2]

Nevertheless, a detour via Orissa can substantiate this affirmation of principle by revealing the same object in a very similar ritual context, yet one in which it has a more limited "function."

[1]One will later find a detail in the worship of Draupadī and Pōtta Rājā in Tamilnadu that corroborates this distinction. Cf. below, p. 106.

[2]Be it understood that this exposition is deliberately confined to a "popular" level of Hinduism, the level at which the disclosure of Vedic roots can have the greatest importance for the comprehension of the whole. At the same time, one cannot pretend to be unaware that the problem arises in the same terms for the phallic representation of Śiva, and that his "origins" are to be sought from the same side rather than in "primitive" phallic cults, Mediterranean or others. The main difference lies in the absence of animal sacrifice to the liṅga.

A. Local Conditions

This detour is of interest because a post having a form identical to that of Pōtu Rāju once existed, and still does, in Orissa in connection with the cult of the Goddess, yet the name Pōtu Rāju completely disappears upon crossing the border from Srikakulam District in Āndhra to Ganjam District in Orissa. Oriya—like Marāṭhī—is an Indo-European language, but that does not account for everything, since we have seen a Potrāj in Mahārashtra geographically prolong the memory of the Āndhra Pōtu Rāju even though the form of the post disappears with that extension.[3] Orissa presents the inverse case, since the post's form remains, but with a new function and without its own name.

Orissa is a region of India with a turbulent history where kingdoms of varied importance were formed and defeated, each giving rise to more or less ephemeral royal cultural centers that last to the present day. Muslim and Maratha dominations brought on drastic changes of the map well before the arrival of the British.[4] The only places of worship to have traversed all these changes without irreversible damage were the temples of Jagannātha in Purī and Liṅgarāja in Bhubaneswar. These, however, are not our present concern,[5] but rather the temples of certain goddesses who receive prominent

[3]In fact, the same form does appear, but at an unexpected place. See below, p. 84, n. 23.

[4]Information pertaining to this history, as well as a good bibliography, is found in Kulke 1979.

[5]Still, we must take note of a fact that seems to have gone unnoticed: one knows that the main shrine of the Jagannātha temple contains, along with Jagannātha (= Kṛṣṇa) himself, his sister Subhadrā, and his brother Balabhadra, a post situated to Jagannātha's left that appears—as far one can judge from its appearances in public—to be of round and equal section from top to base. This post is called Sudarśana, from the well-known name of Kṛṣṇa's *cakra* (discus). The first question is then: what is this post that flanks Jagannātha, and why does it bear the name *cakra*? Furthermore, one knows that during the annual chariot or car festival when the deities are taken out in procession through the city, there are three temple-cars: one each for Jagannātha, Balabhadra, and Subhadrā *and* Sudarśana (cf. Kulke 1979, photo 9). The post thus shifts its association to the Goddess (Subhadrā being here more or less clearly identified with the Goddess, notwithstanding the presence in the temple of a shrine dedicated to the local goddess Vimalā). One is thus tempted to relate this ritual feature to an iconographic representation of Sudarśana that is found in bas-relief on the eastern gopuram of the Liṅgarāja temple in Bhubaneswar; it is a faithful replica of Pōtu Rāju (unless, of course, the opposite is true). Cf. Eschmann et al. 1978, photo 46. Eschmann notes the resemblance of this Sudarśana with a wooden post (photo 69) that she calls Khambeśvarī, a goddess therefore, represented by a post and including at the base a stylized relief that is difficult to make out. It would be tempting to see Narasiṃha disemboweling Hiranyakaśipu here (as is abundant in the region), but Kulke (1979) sees this post as a sacrificial one and the relief as a kīrtimukha. Yet more posts are found in Eschmann et al. 1978, photos 61, 63, 68 (and even 60) whose form evokes even more directly the Sudarśana of the Liṅgarāja temple and Pōtu Rāju. Eschmann's methodological point of departure, and that of the other authors in the book, is, however, diametrically opposed to mine, and did not lead her to isolate the particular form that a familiarity with the posts of Āndhra would have obliged her to notice. In any case, this form is known in such a "classical" temple as the Liṅgarāja (tenth to eleventh centuries), and the Jagannātha cult associates it with the Goddess. In Orissa, Goddess temples are rather habitually surmounted by a cakra, recalling among other things that the Goddess is Viṣṇu's sister—something that Āndhra farmers would not be disposed to admit for their grāmadevatās. Kṛṣṇa's cakra serves him in the fight against demons. How does it come about that there is a transition from cakra to post (the specific form of which the Sudarśana in the shrine has lost)?

There is, moreover, another example where the post and cakra have a connection evidenced in ritual, but left unexplained. At the Virajā temple in Jājpur (Cuttack Dt.), where a yoke-post (see below) is permanently installed at the center of the front courtyard, one notes in this same yard, northeast of the sanctuary, a stone post called *śubha-stambha* (plate 21) with a form very similar to that of Pōtu Rāju. This is a commemorative

worship. As a general rule, it is no longer a question of simple grāmadevatās (*grāmadevatī* in Oriya), but of goddesses still known to have been tutelary deities of princely lineages or of chieftains ruling in the region, even should these lineages have since disappeared. These are the goddesses who earlier, or more recently, received buffalo sacrifices at the time of Durgāpūjā—which here lasts sixteen days (plus one), rather than nine days (plus one). One is thus no longer at the same level of religion as with Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra. Not only is the cult more regular in Orissa, but it is better articulated and lends itself to more precise descriptions. Moreover, the upper castes, including Brahmans, are present in the worship, at least those devoted to the service of kings. Another factor plays in the same direction, one that is perhaps also inseparable from the royal level of Hinduism, but "explicable" by the proximity of Bengal: tantrism reigns, and blood rites are not repugnant to tantric Brahmans. Even those who do not practice the five *ma*s (the five tantric practices of the so-called left hand, which reverse the traditional rules of Brahman lifestyle) know of them and accept to speak of them. We therefore have, in theory, better informants than in Āndhra, and direct observation can be compared both with texts and with a still-living literate oral tradition. The practice is, however, much less exalting, and the progressive disappearance of local chieftainships led to a degradation of the cult that was all the more irreparable for its having been more elaborated. It is also rare to find two informants whose reports exactly match, and one can only treat with caution the material gathered in the course of always brief visits.

Contrary to the Indo-German team that worked in Orissa (Eschmann et al., 1978), I am inclined to believe that the presence of several tribes in the hinterland is not a decisive factor in the formation of the region's Hinduism. These tribes appear in myths and cults, and have their own temples. There being no trace of the process of the encounter between Hindus and aboriginal populations, the idea that imposes itself is one of symbiosis. The tribes most often assume the role of local low castes, even should they have kept a differentiated religion. However brief and spatially restricted my investigation may have been (two stays in 1976 and 1977), I found no sign to indicate that the very specific form of post that we know of in coastal and rural Āndhra would in Orissa have a privileged link with tribals. This form, with its variants, is sufficiently widespread throughout south India to make a tribal origin for it in Orissa highly improbable. Within the framework of this study, there is no place to enter further into a discussion of a tribal contribution.[6]

post of an aśvamedha celebrated by King Yayāti when he brought in Brahmans from Kanauj. (Which Yayāti? In any case, only the goddess's mūrti is old; everything else must have been reconstructed more than once.) This post (which is itself unfortunately not the original one) was apparently the starting point of the temple that Yayāti had constructed to his goddess (note the link between the asvamedha, the sacrifice of victory, and the Goddess). When lastly the cakra was affixed at the top of the shrine, a red cord was attached to it that Yayāti held in his hand while making pradakṣinā of the temple and consecrating it to the goddess. Today, it seems that the śubhastambha is connected to the cakra by means of a cord to offer pūjā to the latter, the subhastambha serving in the pūjā as a substitute for the cakra. While this commemorative post evokes Pōtu Rāju, it would also be instructive to compare it to the commemorative posts of Vedic sacrifices at the Mathura Museum. Cf. Chhabra 1947 and his bibliography. Cf. above, p. 38, n. 10, and plate 16.

[6]It would be all the more irrelevant since the Indo-German team worked above all on the cult of

It is indeed to her sovereignty that the Goddess owes the title of *ṭhākurāṇī* nearly everywhere in north India, and particularly in Bengal. In Āndhra, she was Amma, "mother," that is to say, "Lady," a common respectful form of address. *Ṭhākurāṇī* is the feminine form of Ṭhākur, "Lord." As protectress of the king and his kingdom—the person and the function are never dissociated—she is more explicitly than ever the warrior goddess, provider of victory and wealth, and in fulfilling this function she is apparently a virgin, even though one must not forget the tantric atmosphere that to a certain extent modifies this situation. Her association with local calamities, epidemics, etc., has faded, or at least is no longer uppermost. She is often flanked in her shrine by two "sisters," Vijayadurgā and Kanakadurgā, upon whom the tasks of the principal deity appear to devolve.[7] The Vijayādaśamī festival, on the last day of Durgāpūjā, is literally "the tenth (day consecrated) to Vijayā," the goddess Victory. As for Kanakadurgā, "the golden Durgā" or Durgā "of gold," her presence could have a precise significance in relation to the ceremony described to me by S. N. Rajguru, which formerly took place among the Gajapati kings of Orissa, notably at the Parlakimedi palace (Ganjam Dt., on the Āndhra border), where Pandit Rajguru resides.[8] According to this firsthand informant, there the Durgāpūjā began in fact on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhādra. But in Orissa, generally the festival of the Goddess officially begins on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Bhādra, and concludes with Vijayādaśamī on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Āśvin, as everywhere else in India.[9] This śukla-dvādaśī is the day of the *aṅka,* the "mark": that is, of the ceremony that is prelude to the minting of gold coins for the year. First a procession goes to the temple of Mallikeśvarī, tutelary deity of the king's lineage (whose sanctuary is on the capital's outer boundary). There the king goes with five ministers, and the seniormost *purohita* offers a *homa* (in the fire) and a meal to the goddess. Then the ceremony unfolds at the palace in the presence of goldsmiths. The minister responsible for the treasury was normally the head of the goldsmith caste, the Sunaris. Kanakadurgā, a movable representation—*calantī pratimā*[10]—of Mallikeśvarī, presides over the performance. The king asks his purohita to state the number of years of his reign (whose calculation is not simple). The seal intended for the minting of the coins remains in the king's care; he subsequently gives it to the goldsmith-minister, instructing him to stamp on it the number indicated by the purohita. During the twenty-five days that separate this

Jagannātha, and was intrigued by the "primitive" and aberrant character of this cultic iconography. If one disallows the axiom that a wooden post may be the simplest representation of a deity, and draws the consequence that every post must be the sign of a primitive and tribal origin, one may realize a way to organize the facts around such an axiom. But does it not first matter to ask what a post signifies?

[7]Kanakadurgā is the protective deity of Vijayavādā. Cf. above, p. 25.

[8]I heartily thank Pandit S. N. Rajguru, a true scholar rightfully well known for his numerous works, notably relating to the dynasty of the Gangas from which the King of Parlakimedi (today, Parlakhemundi in Oriya) issued. The important kings of Orissa bore the title *gajapati*, "Master of elephants."

[9]Note the underlying Vedic symbolism of these numbers? Sixteen is the number of officiating priests at the solemn sacrifice, while 17 (16 + 1) is Prajāpati, or the year, being twelve months and five seasons, which is the measure of the liturgical cycle.

[10]This is the exact equivalent of the term *utsavamūrti* as used in the south.

ceremony from *mahāsaptamī* (the seventh day of Navarātri; that is, the seventh day of the bright fortnight of Āśvin), the chaplain recites every night the *Caṇḍīpāṭha* (= the *Devī-māhātmya*) in front of Kanakadurgā, who will remain at the palace until Vijayādaśamī. After each recitation, he conducts a pūjā to the goddess, then proceeds to offer pūjā to Mallikeśvarī in her temple at the boundary. The link is thus well attested between the *kuladevī* and her "delegates," and the name Kanakadurgā is made explicit by both the royal and warrior functions that have devolved upon her. In Parlakimedi, the public celebrations of the Durgāpūjā begin only on mahāsaptamī.[11]

It can be inferred from this ceremony performed by the Gajapatis of Orissa that the presence of Kanakadurgā next to the principal goddess in a temple involved, at one time or another in history, the royal function of the temple in question.[12]

B. Textual Givens

Theoretically, the ritual of the royal temples in Orissa is codified, and the authoritative text there for the cult of the Goddess is the *Durgotsavacandrikā,* which (according to oral information from S. N. Rajguru) would be from the fifteenth century. The manuscript bearing this name in the Bhubaneswar State Museum Library is attributed to the Gajapati Rāmachandradeva, who would have had it compiled by the rājaguru Varddhanācārya. However, I found no trace of a Gajapati with this name in the fifteenth century, whereas there is one at the beginning of the twentieth century. The copy of the manuscript I obtained is only a very poor compilation that cites its sources negligently and insufficiently identifies them: Saṃhitā, Tantra, Purāṇa. It seems to be nothing very original, nor specifically regional. Moreover, it is quite impossible to reconstruct the Durgāpūjā celebration with any continuity on the basis of this text, and the most elementary information is lacking. Judging from appearances, oral tradition must have once again played a decisive role. This is notably the case for the subject at hand, the sacrificial post employed in the buffalo sacrifice; there is a post, but nothing is said about its form or its fashioning. One cannot rule out the possibility of two *Durgotsavacandrikā*s, and that the one I used is not the good one. Beyond this, I obtained some very fragmentary citations of texts from a celebrated pandit from Purī. In response to my questioning, supported by drawings, he looked for information concerning the post.[13] All in all little resulted, and we may wonder what the relative permanence of

[11]Let us note already, so as not to have to return to this point in the second part of this book, that Orissa ignores the śamīpūjā and the sīmollaṅghana of Vijayādaśamī. Moreover, the region does not appear to have a single śamī tree or any of its substitutes. The śamī seems to be little known, but in the north of the country there is a hill called śamīvṛkṣya: this would be the remainder (!) of the śamī in which Arjuna concealed his and his brothers' weapons (MBh 4.5). In Parlakimedi, however, Vijayādaśamī's warrior and royal dimensions are not unknown, what with sword fighting, archery competitions, nominations to important official posts, etc.

[12]It is also surprising to observe that most of the royal boundary temples are edifices almost as modest as the grāmadevatā temples in Āndhra (see above, p. 10). That of Mallikeśvarī at Parlakimedi, at a place where the heirs of the Gajapatis still live in the palace, which is apparently well maintained, is a striking example.

[13]I shall only cite such fragments as he copied in my presence from a manuscript that I myself saw. It is a question of a transcription in Oriya letters from which nearly all the Sanskrit *anusvara*s and *visarga*s had disappeared.

this important royal ritual might rest on, if not on oral transmission from officiant to officiant.

Three observations will be retained from the *Durgotsavacandrikā* (the one I used). There is, first, an enumeration of victims that please the Goddess: "Śivā is satisfied for two hundred years with the blood of a ram (probably *aurabhreṇa* rather than *auraṇena*), she is satisfied for ten years if worshipped with the blood of a goat. The consort of Bhava experiences extreme satisfaction for one hundred years with (the blood of) a buffalo. But she is in delight for a thousand years if one adores her with the blood of a human victim. The beloved of Śiva has unequalled satisfaction for one month with (the blood of) a cock, and she is especially satisfied for forty years with the blood of a boar. But she is delighted for an infinity of years with blood offered from her own body." One point is surprising: the mention of the boar among the victims. But it is not impossible that the boar would have been at a given moment, and not only in Orissa, the victim for the spring Durgāpūjā, symmetrical to the buffalo offered at the autumn festival.[14] The offering of her own blood that the Goddess makes to herself (unless one must understand that it refers less grammatically to the blood of the offerer himself) is an allusion to Chinnamastā.[15] The other victims correspond quite well to those known in practice, including as we shall see the "human sacrifice." Let us recall that the very idea of human sacrifice has its roots in the most authentic Vedic tradition, but that it does not imply an execution of this sacrifice, since, on the contrary, what the Vedic theory signifies is that every sacrificial victim is only a substitute for the only real victim: the human sacrificer.

Moreover, the noble character of the sacrifice is underscored by the explicit mention of the *varṇas* to which the executioner may belong. One will recall that the Vedic ritual Sūtras were more than discreet regarding this personage (so that the Mīmāṃsā could discuss diametrically opposed opinions about him; cf. above, p. 42, n. 14); no doubt euphemistically, one called him the śamitar. The *Durgotsavacandrikā* (*rathapratiṣṭhā* 35) does not hesitate to call a spade a spade, even though it employs no technical terms. But the "appeasement" of the victim has become simply its killing—*vadha*. This must be the work of either a Brahman, Kṣatriya, or Vaiśya, but never of a Śūdra or a member of the three higher varṇas who would not be in a state of ritual purity. This confirms the

[14]Cf. Tod and Crooke (1971, 80, 385 and above all 660): a ritual hunt in which the Rājpūts must gather their vassals around them and consume the slain boar on the site. But it is also in Rājasthān (and perhaps in the Himalayan kingdoms) that the buffalo sacrifice during the autumn Durgāpūjā, carried out by Rājpūts, sometimes mimes or retains elements of a hunt whose emulation, carried out between young Rājpūts, resembles both play and war. In Vedic tradition, it would be a matter of two wild animals, thus unfit for sacrifice, but the classical tradition retains their character as animals of the forest. Where the allusion is to the buffalo whose blood pleases the Goddess, it could only be to a wild buffalo.

Apart from these scant indications of a ritual complementarity between the boar and the buffalo, only epic passages are available. The MBh knows the Vedic-purāṇic cosmogonic boar. But the animal slain simultaneously by the two rival arrows of Śiva and Arjuna in the scene called "Siva as hunter" (3.39 [40]) is also a boar, this time asuric, whose name Mūka is consonant with Emūṣa, the cosmogonic boar in ŚPB 4.1.2.11. It is also in the MBh that the Buffalo asura appears for the first time as the enemy of the god Skanda. Nothing, however, allows one to connect the two animals in the epic.

[15]I reserve a discussion of this subject for another place, as it is a vast one in itself.

at once royal and tantric character of the Goddess's worship. Yet if one confronts these prescriptions with the facts, one sees the Brahman priest or the upper caste sacrificer often content himself with symbolically touching the victim with a weapon after its consecration, and then handing the instrument of death to the real executioner. The latter, in Orissa, can be either of very low caste, or from a locally dominant caste, thus representing the Kṣatriya varṇa (for example, a Khandāyat). The symbolic putting to death is akin to Vedic practices in which the first contact with the weapon, the contact that counts because it alone has full significance, is made by the adhvaryu, who then gives the implement or weapon to the actual executor. This symbolic act is, after all, found nearly everywhere in India, most particularly where the dominant caste ("Kṣatriya") itself refuses to perpetrate the animal's death.

A final point to keep in mind from the *Durgotsavacandrikā* pertains to the post that is to be erected for sacrifice to the Goddess (ibid. 15): "The discerning man should erect the post of khadira wood without flaw that is recommended (*ruta* [?]), seven cubits (high) with two cubits set in the ground; it is the one most suitable for realizing what one desires." The post—*yūpa*—is here prescribed without indicating a particular victim, and no other detail is given, no ritual for installation. One notes simply that the term employed—*yūpa*—belongs to Vedic vocabulary, and that the post is to be newly erected for each sacrifice after the fashion of the Vedic yūpa (Pōtu Rāju is permanent and remains in place to the point of extreme decrepitude). It is presumed that the rest is known. Finally, khadira wood is a variety that the Vedic ritual specialists recommend for the fashioning of the post.

Faced with these scant instructions, whose primary interest is the continuity they confirm between the Vedic ritual and the sacrifice to the Goddess, we must also take into account what is learned from *Śyāmārcanataraṅginī-tantra* 3.24:[16] "Let one preferably take a śamī stick to make the post. Let one attach (the victim) to this stick that has an auspicious (*saumya*) character, then let one offer worship to the pot." This prescription is corroborated by *Kukuṭṭika-tantra* 6.19-20 (which would be a Śābara text, from the Śābara "tribe," although it is not known whether that designates the real Saora tribe or the inferior priests at the Jagannātha temple in Purī and certain goddess temples). "For the aspersion of the grand victim (here probably the buffalo), a post should preferably be made of śamī, which alone gives health and riches and all the objects one may desire. It must be four cubits (high), well coated (with *ghī?*), and after having been erected at a chosen site in the ground, it should be worshipped according to the rules." Here again there is no description of the yūpa, but the indication of its material makeup is interesting. If the texts are from Orissa (and because of its relation to the Śābaras, the second one certainly is), they could very well have prescribed something that has always gone unheeded or, in any case, that was very difficult to follow. According to the pandit from Purī, this would nevertheless represent the norm, and employing wood of any other type would only be a substitute. I mention this interpretation with a view to the

[16]This text and the following were conveyed to me by the pandit from Purī to whom I referred earlier. The text includes a word that, in this context, is certainly erroneous: *kalalam*. I will translate here as if had been *kalaśam*, given that all festivals of the Goddess include the installation of one or more pots of water to represent the deity and to whom worship is addressed. But one would prefer a word designating the victim.

facts known from Āndhra and the symbolic importance of the śamī in varied forms for the cult of the Goddess throughout the Deccan and south India. But while other regions of India give the name śamī to the tree that they use as such, no more is said in Orissa than that the post is made of this or that type of wood—and it is never śamī. Despite the practical impossibility, one must no doubt affirm the norm: the notation is all the more important as the post made of śamī is ascribed a beneficial character, quite the contrary to what the Vedic yūpa habitually connotes. Since the buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess implies a certain number of inversions with regard to the Vedic animal sacrifice (we shall return to this point), the utilization of the śamī for the yūpa could find here its proper significance: it is the auspicious sense of the śamī that is deliberately favored, and it is again the connotation of its name that permits this.

C. Ritual Facts

Humility and prudence are required when speaking of ritual facts. I observed none of these celebrations and, for the most part, those that were described to me took place in the past. Moreover, the rule prevails in Orissa that a post is to be destroyed after the sacrifice, or is at least not to remain in situ between festivals. At the very least, it is to be left lying on the ground. To this we must add that Orissan posts are of two types. One, which the texts mention as the yūpa but which people call *balikunta* or *balikambha,* is not at all functional, while the other, currently called *jūpakāṣṭha* (but which the pandit from Purī calls *argali*), constitutes a sort of yoke for confining the neck of the animal and immobilizing it at the time of its decapitation. It is the *balikunta*—the yūpa in the texts—that has the same form as Pōtu Rāju. Since permanence in front of the sanctuary is the first sign of its aberrant character, I could see it, only paradoxically, where its traditional ritual usage was absent or obsolete. The one in the Kambheśvarī temple at Aska, whose photograph is published in Eschmann et al. (1978), is situated where tribals abound in the mountainous region of Ganjam District. There are several in the region, and their location in front of goddess sanctuaries is reminiscent of Pōtu Rāju. Besides, this location is not far from Āndhra. On the other hand, the most beautiful specimen I saw, covered in blood from a votive offering made on the same morning, in Simulyapasi (Dhenkanal Dt., Kamakhyanagar Tk.; see plate 22), was placed before the sanctuary—a simple uncovered platform (*vedi*) beneath an immense vault of trees several hundred years old—of the goddess Kālunī ("the Deaf"). Kālunī is truly in the forest, but a sparse forest that constitutes the local people's territory through which cows and female buffalo pasture. It could be that it is again a case of a "goddess of the boundary," and its link with the King of Talcher is underlined by the following story: Kālunī is represented seated but without a head; it was the King of Talcher who, one day, had severed the head and brought it into his palace to offer it worship. My informant's father and grandfather had seen it there. The story, however, has little likelihood when one knows the importance Hindus attach to the integrity of the mūrti for worship. And the thick cover of minium and oil that overlays the upper body does not allow one to verify whether it has been divided or not. But myth is always more significant than true

history. One retains from it here only a locally known rapport with the Talcher king.[17] The Durgāpūjā does not appear to be celebrated here in any particular manner and there is no buffalo sacrifice, but the favored day for the offering of goats and cocks (always individual votive offerings) is the full moon of Śrāvan. The locality, predominantly pastoral, includes no tribal population. As for the jūpakāṣṭha, which seems to have no textual foundation, it can frequently be observed either permanently in place, as at Jājpur in front of Virajā (plate 21) or at Cuttack before Caṇḍī, or put away in a corner until the next festival, as is often the case.

The problem that arises, from our point of view, is the concurrent utilization of these two very different posts. The pandit from Purī affirms that they must both be present: the traditional balikunta for attaching the animal at the post's mid-height, and having only a symbolic function; the yoke or jūpakāṣṭha to hold the animal's head. But the degradation of the cult is such that one of the two posts is frequently missing. The facts initially seem to confirm this. However, rather than reviewing all the scant data gleaned on location, we will briefly describe a ritual that employs both types of post while suggesting another form of complementarity between them. So as not to privilege a perhaps unique case and lend it universal value, I will nuance the information that this ritual provides by means of other facts collected elsewhere.

The temple chosen is that of Bhagavatī in Bāṇpur (Purī Dt., Khurda Subd.), notably because its actual (or recent?) ritual retains the imprint of the dominant position of its prince (the King of Purī himself) at a given time in its history, and because the buffalo sacrifice is still attested there. The principal mūrti is an eight-armed Mahiṣāsuramardinī with Mahiṣa at her feet. Bhagavatī faces west, the inverse of the east-facing Jagannātha, who has a small temple outside Bhagavatī's enclosing wall and near the wall's entrance. In the maṇḍapa before Bhagavatī's garbhagṛha, to her right there is a post garbed in a black skirt. This is Virijāi, one of Bhagavatī's processional forms[18] (fig. 3).

Preparation for the festival extends over several months, if one takes into account the four *ājñāmālās*, "garlands of permission" or "garlands of authority," which must be brought together at the temple in order for the festival to be held. These garlands are so many acts of submission on the part of the goddesses who send them to Bhagavatī, who is considered as their older sister. The garlands recall that their "owners," local headmen who worship these goddesses, are vassals of the Purī king. The Durgāpūjā, and more particularly the Vijayādaśamī concluding it, is marked by the mandatory presence of vassals around the suzerain and the renewal of their allegiance. These links are first symbolized by the ājñāmālās of the subordinate goddesses, and the garlands represent them at the Bhagavatī temple: through them, they participate in Bhagavatī's Durgāpūjā. Birijāi (whose temple is some fifteen kilometers from Bāṇpur) sends hers at the time of Māgh Saṅkrānti; Nārāyaṇī (of Valeri Hill, Ganjam Dt., Khallikota Subd.) is next for the Mahāviṣuvasaṅkrānti of Vaiśākh—that is, roughly around the spring equinox that marks the new year. But at the Nārāyaṇī temple, this is denied with the claim that the sending

[17]But this could be no more than another example of a decapitated goddess such as Hindu mythology provides us from south and north.

[18]Is the name Virijāi (or Birijāi) a deformation of Virajā? I found no mention of this anywhere, notably not in Rajguru 1971-73.

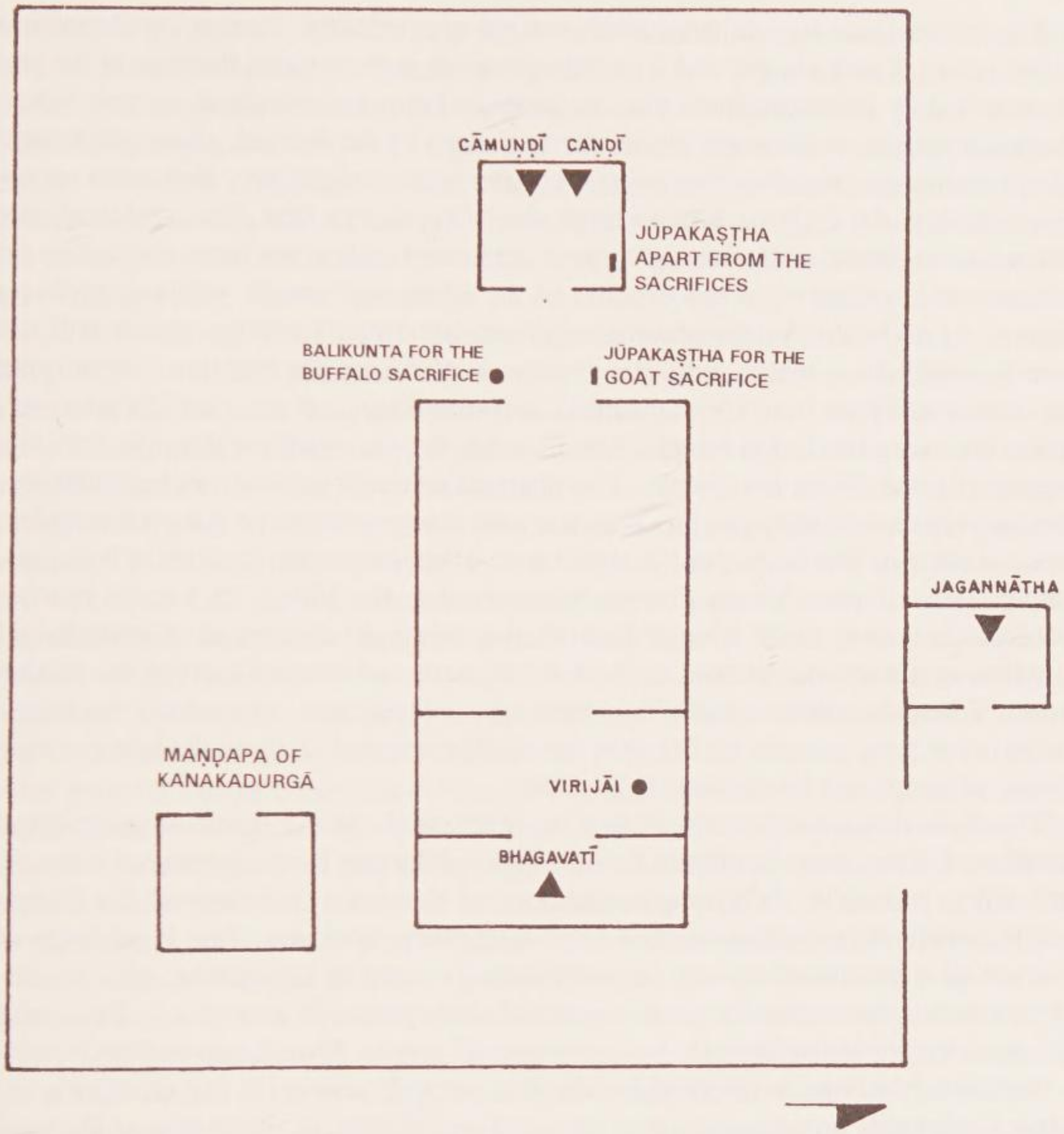

Fig. 3. Schema of the Bāṇpur Bhagavatī temple

of the mālā was discontinued on the day the Purī king lost power. *Kālijāi* (whose temple is on the mountain island of Chilka Lake) sends her garland on the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Bhādra.[19] The arrival of her garland marks the festival's beginning: as everywhere in Orissa, the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Bhādra (beginning of September). For this occasion, in addition to the customary priests (Mahāpātra Yajurvedin Brahmans), a *tāntrika* comes from Purī. The hereditary *dharmakartā* (present temple equivalent of the Vedic yajamāna) is a Mālisevayat (a landowner caste). The executioner is a Khandāyat (landowners with Kṣatriya claims).

[19]It should be noted that four garlands are announced, but only three enumerated. One suspects that this is at least as much a matter of recollections (and of pretensions) as of facts. In any case, Kālijāi's garland is the fourth and last.

The processional forms (here called *pratimā* or *pratinidhi,* "image" or "substitute") of Bhagavatī, Kanakadurgā, and Vijayadurgā are kept throughout the year at the temple of their father Dakṣaprajāpati that is located about five hundred meters from the Bhagavatī temple. A fortnight before the beginning of the festival, these goddesses fall asleep; eight days later they turn over; then after another eight days they wake up on the festival's first day.[20] Both Kanakadurgā and Vijayadurgā (the first a Mahiṣāmardinī with ten arms, the second with eight arms) are bathed with water from 108 *kalaśas* and, well adorned, are taken in the evening to the Bhagavatī temple where a pūjā is performed. At midnight, Vijaya-pratimā returns to her father's residence. She will do the same for eight days, that is, until the new moon of Āśvin. On that day, Virijāi-pratimā (the petticoated post from the maṇḍapa) leaves the Bhagavatī temple fully adorned and proceeds toward the Dakṣa temple. On the way, she encounters Vijaya-pratimā who is returning to the Bhagavatī temple. The dharmakartā watches over and coordinates all these movements. Virijāi-pratimā continues her route toward the paternal temple, but does not enter it. She is received in the "house-of-seven-rooms," a kind of hall near the temple. For her part, Vijaya-pratimā has arrived at the Bhagavatī temple bearing an ājñāmālā that is sent to the King of Purī. During this eight-day period, Kanakadurgā has remained in a maṇḍapa situated to the left (respective of the goddess) of the Bhagavatī shrine. When the other two pratimās have encountered each other along the way, she leaves in her turn, armed with her weapons, and proceeds directly to the house-of-seven-rooms, accompanied by the four ājñāmālās.

The festival reaches its culmination on Mahāṣṭamī. In the house-of-seven-rooms a sacrifice of three goats is offered to Kanakadurgā by the King of Parikud (one of the Purī king's vassals?). At midnight, the door of the outer enclosure of the Bhagavatī temple, where the principal sacrifices will take place, is closed. This is probably done to sever all communication with the neighboring temple of Jagannātha, who would not tolerate such a spectacle. The series of sacrifices begins with that of a buffalo, offered by a wealthy private individual in consequence of a vow. Should two buffalo be offered in the same year, one is reserved for the next year. In any case, the sacrifice's votive nature is stressed, running counter to the usual significance of the buffalo at Durgāpūjā. However, prior to the slaying the executioner must ask permission of the *parīkṣa,* the administrator who formerly represented the Purī king, and who today is the executive officer appointed by the provincial government. Probably the Purī king had to renounce not only presiding over the ceremony himself, but, so as to be at peace with Jagannātha, the offering of the buffalo. Whence ensues the fiction of the votive buffalo tempered by the royal permission.

For the beheading, a balikunta is implanted near the doorway of the outermost maṇḍapa of the temple of Bhagavatī (see fig. 3), at her left—that is, also near the sanctuary of Caṇḍī and Cāmuṇḍī that faces Bhagavatī's. In the form we now know so well, this kunta is made for the occasion from sandalwood, and will be thrown into the river immediately after the execution. As is well known, sandalwood is not only

[20]The Goddess imitates Viṣṇu who sleeps through the monsoon cāturmāsya and turns over at the end of two months, midway through his period of sleep. Aside from this structural analogy, it does not appear that the Goddess's liturgical cycle can be linked with that of the god.

expensive but auspicious. Sandalwood paste, with refreshing properties, is employed ritually to please the deity, to appease his or her anger.[21] When all is said and done, sandalwood is a worthy substitute for the śamī in the fashioning of this post. After the buffalo has been put to death, votive goats are sacrificed (there can be several hundred of them), for which a jūpakāṣṭha of sāl wood is utilized. The latter is usually kept in a dark corner of the Caṇḍī and Cāmuṇḍī shrine, but for this occasion it is installed near the same doorway to the Bhagavatī temple as the kunta for the buffalo, but on the entrance's other side. As the beheadings proceed (including the buffalo's), the blood is collected in a tray upon which the buffalo's head is placed, and this is then brought before the goddess. The sanctuary's front door is sealed to allow the deity to revel in this feast. When the door is again opened in the morning (all the sacrifices have taken place in the night between Mahāṣṭamī and Mahānavamī), all traces of blood have disappeared from the temple floor (a veiled allusion to the DM myth in which Kālī's tongue must catch all the blood drops from the demon that would otherwise fall to the ground).

Although there is a link—a semantic one—between this sacrifice and the rite that follows it, let us first pause to consider the manner in which the posts are utilized. The balikunta made of sandalwood is no more functional than the Vedic post. Midway up it the buffalo is tied to it, but this is not what immobilizes the animal. On the other hand, it undoubtedly possesses an auspicious function. It is possible that the yūpa mentioned in the texts would normally be reserved for the buffalo and that the goats would have another post. The same complementarity, in any case, is found at the Carccikā temple in Baṅki (Cuttack Dt.), another capital of a kingdom that had its days of glory. For Mahāṣṭamī, at midnight one first offers a goat that is still today procured by the Baṅki rāja. The goat is sacrificed in front of the main sanctuary, a little to the left of Carccikā (who faces east), and a crude post—a simple tree branch permanently implanted there but renewed each year—is utilized, situated down below the sanctuary and thus not visible to the goddess. It is called *aṅkulokāṭṭha, aṅkulo* being the Oriya form of the Sanskrit *aṅkola* (*Alangium salviifolium*), the name of a small tree with hard wood.[22] Then, at one o'clock in the morning, the buffalo is sacrificed at another site in front of the main shrine and still farther down the slope, where it more or less faces a small sanctuary of Maṅgalā (note the goddess's auspicious name, which we will meet again in Tamilnadu). The latter shrine is perpendicular to that of Carccikā and remains open during the ceremony. A post is installed for the occasion made of white aṅkulo (it is not known what is white, but see below, p. 83). Its form is that of Pōtu Rāju, somewhat elongated, with a round section, but with the base clearly larger and squared. It is locally called *argali* (which would rather be the name of the yoke, according to the pandit from Purī).[23] The buffalo is tied by its horns and neck midway up it. The *pūjārī,*

[21]It seems in particular that this would be the meaning of the superabundant use of sandalwood paste at Simhācalam on the mūrti of Narasimha. It is a question of a Varāha-Narasimha, who must be understood as "terrible"; on all but one day of the year, he is covered with a thick layer of sandalwood paste that transforms him into a kind of massive post.

[22]Cf. *Wealth of India*, vol. I p. 42, s.v. Alangium salviifolium.

[23]One could evoke either the unhewn base of the Vedic yūpa (but buried entirely in the ground), or the square base of the liṅga (likewise in the ground).

a rājaguru, performs a pūjā to it, recites the *paśumantra,* and three times touches the buffalo's neck with a sword before giving the sword to the Māli executioner. The latter's assistants hold the animal's hind legs. Here again, the head and blood are collected and offered to the goddess before their submergence in the river (the Mahānadī), while the drummers divide up the body among themselves. On the morning of *navamī,* the buffalo's sacrificial post is also submerged. On the following night, there will be other goat sacrifices at the permanent post that was used for the first sacrifice, which will be used throughout the year for votive sacrifices. The buffalo was formerly offered by the Baṅki king, but it is now the responsibility of the Temple Trust, probably because it has become too expensive for the dispossessed king. Finally, for daśamī the kalaśa that has represented the goddess throughout the entire festival is sent to the king, at whose palace is a Kanakadurgā temple. The priests say it is probably the king who undertakes to submerge it, but they do not appear to know for certain.

A ritual is thus found in Baṅki for an important royal goddess in which the arrangement of the posts is analogous to that at Bāṇpur. The yoke-type posts that I was able to see could, moreover, not have served in the buffalo sacrifice, since the indentation at the top barely sufficed for the neck of a goat. Yet I must note a piece of information—which I could not verify—that at the Durgā temple in Laxmennath (Balasore Dt.), the buffalo would be sacrificed with the help of one of these yokes, but a much larger one made each time anew. Laxmennath is in the north of Orissa, near Bengal, and the informant went on to affirm that the buffalo's flesh is consumed by everyone there including the Brahman priest, since it is a prasāda. The executioner is nevertheless a "caṇḍāla" (the informant's term), that is, someone of a very low local caste that probably has another name. All the same, let us keep in mind the probability that in Orissa the yūpa prescribed by the texts, which seems to correspond to the form of Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra, has an association with the buffalo sacrifice, while the yoke is reserved for goats.[24]

[24]One finds an analogous yoke device made of stone in the Kongu area (between Salem and Coimbatore) that serves in the buffalo sacrifice (cf. below, pp. 206 ff. and plate 86). I will also mention, but as an aberrant case yet to be explained, the presence of two posts of the jūpakāstha type put up beside each other and serving as a cultic representation of Veṅkaṭācalapati in Karunkulam (Tirunelveli Dt., Srivaikuntham Tk.; see plate 23). The upper and lower parts of the two posts are square while the median section is octagonal. Yet the four uprights of what should form the two yokes are not pierced with holes to allow the placement of transversal bars. They are used to transform the posts into an anthropomorphic mūrti: a dhoti is wrapped around their shafts. A cakra is attached to the left upright, a conch (of white metal) to the right one, and the nāmam of Veṅkateśvara and a royal tiara made of brass are placed on the two joined central uprights. At the base, a brass plate represents two legs and feet, with the end flap of a belt in the middle. The separation of the uprights of each post is about eight centimeters. The local myth explains little and not a word is said regarding the very particular forms of the two pieces of wood, apparently unknown in India's deep south. One knows of Veṅkateśvara as a fiercely vegetarian god, and his local priest is moreover an Aiyangar. In any case, the ritual is vaikhānasa, less rigid than the pāñcarātra. But the mūrti could in fact assemble two sacrificial yoke-like posts to make an image of the golden puruṣa of the agnicayana. Cf. below, p. 72, n. 28. The transformation of the two posts into a human form is clear when they are provided with their metallic attributes and dhoti. The obstinate refusal of the priest of Veṅkaṭācalapati to allow the clothing on the shafts of the posts to be entirely removed is thus understandable. However, the passage from the puruṣa with upraised arms to the post finds here a supplementary illustration and variant.

The ritual sequence connected with the animal sacrifices to Bhagavatī seems to have nothing to do with sacrificial posts, and would thus appear to stray from our immediate subject. In fact, however, it introduces "human sacrifice," an important topic in which we will see more and more the crisscrossing strands that principally concern us in the course of our regional inquiries. After the doors have again been reopened in the morning, the heads and bodies of the victims are distributed first to the Mālis, then to others (?). The executioner in the sacrifices of the preceding night and his assistants (two Khandāyats) now go, provided with a goat's head and sword, to the house-of-seven-rooms. There they find a *bali-jana,* that is, a candidate for human sacrifice (in modern parlance *bali,* "offering," has more the general sense of "animal offering"). He is also from the Khandāyat caste, and, according to local tradition, a member of the family of balijanas who formerly furnished the victims of human sacrifices to Bhagavatī and received a piece of land as a price for this "service." The two executioners submit him to a kind of third degree: a whipping, a deafening gong, the severing of his ligaments at the joints of his arms, until the victim loses consciousness. This would also appear to take place at night, since it is for the daśamī that they lead this man to the Bhagavatī temple as dead, place him behind the goddess's principal mūrti at the back of the sanctuary, and reshut the door. When they return a few hours later, the man is healed and given the meal that has been offered to the goddess. It is also at this time that Virijāi is brought back to the temple. The "human sacrifice" marks the end of the Durgāpūjā. During the sixteen days it lasts, the *Caṇḍīpāṭha* and the *Aparājitāpāṭha* are recited.

More than the ritual torture, the victim's rapid "healing" from the cruelties suffered strikes the imagination of those present. It is attributed to the goddess's omnipotence and grace, and it is tempting to see in it the actualization and ritualization of a ubiquitous mythic motif in popular religion, namely, that of the grace accorded by the goddess to the demon she slays at the moment of his death. It is this grace *in articulo mortis* that permits the wicked asura's conversion into a faithful devotee and guardian: precisely that which accounts for the transformation of Mahiṣāsura into our Pōtu Rāju. But why must a man double here for the animal victims? Why not enact the same scene with an animal? Let us recall that in several versions of the DM, when the Goddess has fatally wounded the buffalo, a human form emerges from him—a *puruṣa* who continues to fight with her. This puruṣa is evidently the mythical equivalent of the immortal portion dwelling in every living being and migrating from body to body. But here it is only a necessary link in the transmission of the "original" message concerning the mechanism of the sacrifice: the yajamāna, the offerer of the sacrifice, who is ideally a king like Mahiṣāsura—like Pōtu Rāju—is the real victim, the one for whom others are only substitutes. The popular actualization of this belief passes by way of the doubling of the sacrifice into the animal offering and the tortures endured by a man, who, moreover, will also be only a substitute for the offerer. It is thus not indifferent here that the balijana would be a Khandāyat who locally has the rank of Kṣatriya and appears as a substitute for the Purī king. The same process can be found at work nearly everywhere in India, the balijana being either of royal rank (or from a locally dominant caste), or of very low caste, which makes him resemble the demon rather than the yajamāna. The

type of torture varies[25] and can itself even become highly symbolic, but the origin myth is always and everywhere the same: the victim is the substitute for a real human sacrifice that would have taken place in a former time.[26] The Carccikā temple at Baṅki knows no practice of this kind for Durgāpūjā; but firewalking takes place at the time of the pilgrimage at Meṣa Saṅkrānti (in Caitra) to the foot of the hill upon which the temple stands. The fire is prepared with coals from the sāl tree[27] and lit with a ghī lamp, thus keeping the trace of a relation with the oblations made in the sacrificial fire. A single man, this time a devotee who has made a vow, walks on the fire after having fasted for three days. He must walk from one end to the other and back four or five times in the presence of the Kanakadurgā who has come in procession from the temple. This rite is considered to be a votive bali, and the man is thus a voluntary balijana. After the ordeal, he is led before the goddess in the temple and sated with a refreshing drink (which gives prominence to products of the cow), the deity's prasāda. It is probably not insignificant that Carccikā's mūrti is seated upon a black human form, lying on its right side and facing forward, arms raised and hands joined above the head in the position of a supplicating bhakta. This figure is no longer the buffalo, but Raṇāsura, the battle demon, but it is not difficult to see in him the buffalo-demon, converted *in articulo mortis* and obligatory corollary of the goddess's victory.[28] Such practices can be found throughout south India, and there will be occasion to study their symbolic aspects. In this regard, Orissa seems to stand rather apart, just as it appears to lack possession rites, at least in the royal temples. But one cannot be surprised that where ritual tortures have undergone such an extensive development, the post and the fire can be found in the background.[29]

The form of Pōtu Rāju is thus well attested in Orissa, but solely as a sacrificial post: *yūpa* according to the texts, *balikunta* or *balikambha* in the local language. If, moreover, one can identify the yūpa of the texts with the balikunta on the ground (rather than with the jūpakāṣṭha, whose name seems closer), it is only because the śamī is mentioned as the most highly recommended material: a choice that does not seem inappropriate, since

[25]At the Durgā temple in Laxmennath, the "human sacrifice" was combined with a game. Coconuts were thrown and had to be caught. But in the course of running, the Brahman priest pricked a man with a needle and then absorbed the blood with cotton that he offered to the goddess. The man thus pricked is said to have died within six months.

[26]Whether or not there were tribes in the area, and whether or not they practiced real human sacrifice, as in the celebrated case of the Khonds. Far from seeing in these tortures the distant memory of a real human sacrifice by primitive tribes, one can with as much probability reverse the reasoning and see in the human sacrifice such as practiced by the Khonds in Orissa a literal interpretation of the Vedic *puruṣamedha*. Of course one would not try to demonstrate this, but there are suggestive uses of the sacrificial post and the fire. Cf. Macpherson 1865, 113 ff., Thurston 1909, 3, 337, photo of the Khond sacrificial post.

[27]The sāl (Skt. *śāla*) has a very rich symbolism, particularly in West Bengal. It was used notably to make "Indra poles" for the festival of Indradhvaja. It too has rather auspicious connotations, whether used for the jūpakāṣṭha or for the fire of the firewalk.

[28]The anthropomorphic seat of the goddess is comparable to that of Ugratārā at Tārādeī Pīṭho (Purī Dt., Busandapur Subd.). Still a royal goddess, isolated in nature, she wears a tiger skin, like the human form who serves as her seat, who is Śiva. This time he lies on his left side, arms raised but without joined palms: the posture of the little golden puruṣa whom one places in the fire-altar of the agnicayana, but also that of the yajamāna who serves as the measure of the Vedic yūpa.

[29]See above, p. 19: the hook-swinging post at Mannūru.

the link between the śamī and the form of the balikunta has its actual counterpart in the Āndhra Pōtu Rāju. Besides, there is evidence for it in one of those transitional constructions engendered by the combination of impermeable linguistic boundaries (Dravidian to the south, Indo-European to the north) and the everyday exchanges between the frontier populations of Āndhra and Orissa. Makharajola (Srikakulam Dt., Sompeta Tk.) is in Āndhra, but only a short distance from the Orissa border. In front of a small, cubical temple there to Pathapatnamamma, which is itself associated with a Palapolamma temple,[30] one finds a Pōtu Rāju made of clay or bricks, covered with plaster and painted blue and white. It is a horseman mounted on his horse, unique of its kind. Behind it, lying in the mud, is a clearly recognizable wooden post that I would like to call Pōtu Rāju. But let there be no mistake, the people there (the temple is located outside the locality) assert that only the mounted rider is Pōtu Rāju. As for the wooden post with its familiar form, it is only erected when there is a goat or cock sacrifice. Its name? I note what I understood after several repetitions of the word: *yappakarra* or *eppakarra*, apparently unintelligible in Telugu. It is I who evoke the jūpakaṣṭha of Orissa, of which it may be a deformation. Let us add that in the adjacent Ganjam Dt. (Orissa), it is the balikunta form that is dominant and the yoke-formed jūpakaṣṭha seems to be unknown. How has this name come to them? They do not know how to account for it, but what is important is indeed that here the familiar representation of Pōtu Rāju is still only a sacrificial post, even at the village level, while Pōtu Rāju is already present. Several kilometers away, on the boundary of the village of Pīdi Mandasa (or Mañjuṣā), there is a tiny sanctuary to a gramādevatā. Over the course of time she has lost her own name and is now only Ammavaru, and she has also seen Pōtu Rāju disappear. In front of this Ammavaru, within a tiny circle surrounded by rocks, a young custard apple tree has been planted to receive votive sacrifices addressed to Pōtu Rāju. All the witnesses present assert that there had once been a wooden post there of the customary form. Destroyed by the elements, it has not been replaced because the village is deeply divided by political factions, though within the locally dominant communist party. . . . Ammavaru for her part is only a broken head (of terra-cotta?) placed on the ground. We are thus indeed in the border zone where passage is made from the sacrificial post to the goddess's little brother.

[30]Local distortions of more widely known names can be assumed; Poleramma, for example, for the second, while the first calls to mind a place name. The sacrifices are addressed to Pālapolamma, although Pōtu Rāju and the post are in front of her sister. Cf. above, p. 8, and plate 7.

IV. Return to Pōtu Rāju

As fragile and degraded as the information gathered in Orissa may be, it allows an appreciable improvement of our knowledge of Pōtu Rāju and supports the attempt of an interpretation based on Vedic facts. On the whole, one can no longer doubt that the representation of this minor god may be linked to a sacrificial post, for which at least the texts attest the Vedic name *yūpa,* the latter reappearing in current practice associated with another form of post that cannot be taken as a stylization of the Vedic post (cf. however p. 70, n. 24). One even kills two birds with one stone, since the link to the sacrificial post is coupled with an echo of Vedic norms. The texts known by the priests in Orissa mention a yūpa made of khadira, but also a post made of śamī, although the śamī has disappeared from the countryside even in the form of a plausible botanical substitute. These texts, therefore, provide a landmark that unfortunately cannot be dated, but which nevertheless gives a certain historical depth to this god without memory, Pōtu Rāju. Moreover, that one has sought to replace the śamī with symbolic surrogates of auspicious connotations supports the idea that this rare material, sought out since the Vedic period for its association with fire, has its essential signification in the idea of "appeasement": the grāmadevatā and her guardian are evidently protective deities, but they are also, as such, "terrible" and given to wrath if not duly honored. The śamī is the means, one that could not be more brahmanical, to which one turns to assure that their ire remains appeased, to cool the fire of their wrath. Among these surrogates, I confine myself here to mentioning the *nīm* (neem, margosa), which we shall return to shortly, but one can already suppose that the nīm adorning Pōtu Rāju on festival occasions, in both his mobile and immobile forms, only reinforces the effect of the śamī, this nīm that at the same time appeases the goddess's fire and the fever of the afflicted—which is all one.

One is thus justified in seeing in Pōtu Rāju the symbolic concentration of several elements, of which the Vedic heritage provides only a portion:

1. He is a stylized form of the Vedic post. The upper knob above the caṣāla-ring would have been enlarged in relation to the tenon of the yūpa to suggest its reinterpretation as a head (human of animal, it matters little), as distinct from the shaft that is the

rest of the body.[1] The post is, of course, the typical instrument of torture in the sacrifice of a living being.

2. It is also linked to the sacrificial fire, which has completely disappeared from village sacrifice in Āndhra, whereas the royal Durgāpūjā in Orissa generally includes a *yajña-kuṇḍa* (sacrificial pit) where ghee and wood oblations are made on the fire over the length of the festival. But this sacrificial fire only appears there in its "appeased" form through the śamī, upon which grows the pipal destined to furnish the sacrificial firesticks. In other words, the śamī does not signify in itself only: it must be seen in relation to the aśvattha or pipal that contains the fire. One further understands that two sexual symbols are condensed in the śamī-pipal relationship: the union of the two trees in question, one female and the other male, but also the union of the two araṇis.

3. In this instance, we are no longer strictly speaking within the Vedic heritage. Pōtu Rāju, if one keeps to the signification of his name, is the buffalo demon, the King Mahiṣa vanquished by the Goddess and transformed by her grace into her devotee and her guardian, or, better yet in Āndhra, into her younger brother entirely devoted to his elder sister's cause. The DM does not allow for this latter transformation, which is a regional and popular one. Other regions also know relationships of an entirely different type between the Goddess and the demon. In Karṇāṭaka (and even in Tamilnadu), the Goddess was a young Brahman woman who was deceived into marriage to a man of very low caste. This motif has infinite variants,[2] and in them the Goddess loses her guardian. In Mahārāṣṭra, Mhasobā protects the goddess but has no tie of kinship with her. It is likely that the formation of Pōtu Rāju as the Goddess's younger brother had as its condition the forgetting of his asuric identity. The passage here from one end to the other is no less remarkable as an example of the pathways of the mythical imagination. It is also of interest because it indicates the closeness of the link between Pōtu Rāju and the Goddess.

4. But he is also identical with the sacrificial victim when the sacrifice is of a buffalo: although he is not a buffalo in the clear consciousness of the people, he is so in the ritual by the very fact that he is associated with every moment of the sacrifice. It is his position as victim that divinizes him, that gives him salvation. The Goddess's murderous gesture is salvific even for the victim, and not only for the community that offers him. In a sense, this is in line with the Vedic sacrifice, which promises an exalted fate to the immolated animal. But the gap widens between an asuric being, even if he is a king, and a victim promised the beatitudes of proximity to the gods: the putting to death becomes properly redemptive. It is the asura's human representative whom the Goddess possesses, proof that she is pleased with the sacrifice. The sacrificial buffalo and the

[1]Commemorative posts from Vedic sacrifices are themselves stylizations of sacrificial posts and give rise to variations (Chhabra 1947). It is likely that these variations, when it is a question of a reutilization in temple religion, are made as a function of different reinterpretations. We will return to this subject, but one should no doubt avoid speaking of a stylization in the sense of, for example, the art historian, since it is governed more by meaning than by a decorative concern or a plastic evolution. To confine oneself to Pōtu Rāju, it remains to be said that the forms found in the border region of Āndhra and Orissa are very crude compared to those seen in coastal Āndhra and Orissa.

[2]Cf. notably Beck 1981 and her bibliography, and Shulman 1976 and 1980.

possessed are both primed with alcohol to ensure the correct performance of their respective roles. Once again one has a measure of the close links connecting the victim, the Goddesses, and the sacrificer(s), all of whom drink alcohol and eat meat. The Goddess in the DM drinks at length to rouse herself for combat, and currently in her temples, notably in royal tantric temples, she receives alcohol as an offering at the same time as the victim's blood. These two latter aspects, 3 and 4, are two facets of the same reality, of a single mental and ritual complex. It is in fact the study of ritual that leads one to propose that Pōtu Rāju, before being the Goddess's younger brother, was her sworn enemy (the anteriority here is of a logical order rather than a chronological one, since we know nothing of the modalities of these transformations).

If one translates this ritual configuration into sociological terms, the low castes could only identify themselves with the victim-devotee, making their participation in the sacrifice come at that price. Bhakti indeed succeeded in integrating every social level into its message of salvation by conserving the language of sacrifice, leaving the most impure castes to implicitly recognize their duty to submit to a global order and to those who first and foremost incarnate it: the local representatives of the high castes.

A. In Search of an Installation Ritual: The Post-God of Kāṇakoṇā

It is thus possible to reverse our approach. With the help of what we have been able to decipher from our initial account of this little god, let us return to the ritual ensemble that surrounds him and consider some of his symbolic traits that would otherwise go unheeded. First, it is only natural to deplore the lacunae in our knowledge of Pōtu Rāju, the most regrettable of which concerns his ritual of installation. Does the *Grāmadevatā-pratiṣṭhā*[3] provide a description? For the moment, we must still acknowledge defeat. No presently known catalog of manuscripts, beginning with that published in his time by Oppert, mentions the *Grāmadevatāpratiṣṭhā*. Nevertheless, the loss is perhaps not so great as one might think. Manuscripts with apparently related content[4] show that the term *grāmadevatā* is not understood here in the technical sense that it has in Āndhra or Orissa of *grāma-(rakṣaka-) devatā*, and that the preoccupation is above all that of specifying where different sanctuaries are to be positioned within a *grāma*. Whatever the initial Vedic inspiration may have been, it is quite likely that the ritual installation of a Pōtu Rāju always falls within the province of oral tradition, with its inevitable variants of time and space. Posts seen in place have been there for a long time—some even in very bad condition—and no eyewitness could recall the installation ceremony.

Yet curiously as ever, some illumination may come from the mysterious but faithful plastic replica of Pōtu Rāju known by the name of *Stambhadeva* that is found in a unique canton of Goa, the *tāluk* (subdistrict) of Kāṇakoṇā in the far southwest of the area. The systematic study of the post-god thus calls for a new detour that is all the more

[3]Cited by Oppert 1972, 455 ff.

[4]Such as chap. 12 of the *Kāmikāgama grāmadevatāsthāpanavidhi*, chap. 48 of the *Rauravatantra* (*grāmadevotsavavidhi*) consulted at the French Institute of Indology in Pondicherry. The *pratiṣṭhāvidhi*s of Renukā and Candī (ibid.) make no mention of Pōtu Rāju, nor of any other *ksetrapāla*.

surprising, since the Goddess drops completely from view. *Stambhadeva* is in fact the name given in a recent book by Pereira, which accords him a paragraph.[5] It is likely that although it is very localized, the geographic distribution is somewhat less limited than Pereira suggests, and that the name is more variable. Personal investigations found the post in at least three situations:

A. As signaled by Pereira, it is first of all a foundation post, one that can be found in nearly every house—at least every old house—in this tāluk, from the Brahman's to the Marāṭha's (who has Kṣatriya status) to the Velipa untouchable's. It is erected when the foundations of a house are laid. A kalaśa is buried, containing a small amount of gold (theoretically an image of the *vāstupuruṣa*), or five precious stones, or five metals, or more simply a rupee, leaves, and bark from five trees (*vaṭa, aśvattha, jambu, udumbara, amra*) and ten *oṣadhis* or herbaceous plants (including the inevitable darbha grass, *śatāvarī* [Asparagus racemosus], etc.). The post is raised above the kalaśa, and a *vāstuśāntipūjā* is performed to secure peace for the residence.[6] According to a Citpāvan (properly: Cittapāvana) Brahman, this pūjā must be performed again every twelve years; according to a Sārasvat(a) Brahman, every sixty years; or every time one enters one's house after a long absence, if others are to be believed. There is no single tradition, but nearly every family has its rules, or its interpretation of what was perhaps once a rule.

The post, of greater or lesser thickness, is fifty-five to sixty centimeters tall (above ground). Sometimes it is made rustically and at other times it is more refined (see plates 24, 25, 26); but its mid-section is usually octagonal, and there is no doubt that its form is identical with that of Pōtu Rāju. Four types of wood are recommended for its fashioning (although one Brahman dared to mention cement substitutes of greater durability!): *maicce*, *attam*, *korgus* and *karcin*, all of which have a milky sap.[7] Normally, this post and, consequently, the kalaśa that it surmounts, are accommodated in the domestic shrine beside the kuladeva. There is, however, an important variant: every extended family divided into several households recognizes as the center of familial celebration the house of the ancestor of the *kula* (the forefather common to the nuclear families, who most often goes no farther back than to the grandfather). In cases of this type, the post and the domestic shrine are separate, the latter remaining proper to the nuclear family. The post, called *kambhadeva* but also Puruṣa (Is it then the vāstupuruṣa or the common ancestor? Should they be distinguished?), is then placed in a room or a kind of hall that can serve as a gathering place. Every ceremony that brings together the brothers and their families begins with the worship of the post and a food offering. The one case I observed of this arrangement was in the house of an Amuṅkar, from a low local caste. Whatever the post's real identity, it is clearly deified (although a Brahman claimed that it was simply the marker of the kalaśa buried beneath it), and is seen as the

[5]Cf. Pereira 1978, 149, and photograph, pl. 20, no. 1. I owe the discovery of this book and the post in Goa to Odile Divakaran, former member of the École Française d'Extrême Orient.

[6]Regarding the comparison of *vāstupurusa* and Ādiśeṣa, who represents the "remainder" of the sacrifice, cf. Shulman 1980, 91.

[7]The four species of trees with milky sap—which must be well known elsewhere—could not be identified under their Konkanī names. Konkanī is an oral language for which there was still no dictionary.

protector of the lineage, the guardian of the household. An initial offering of food to the post transforms the subsequent family meal into the consumption of the sacrificial remainder.

As for the customary worship of the domestic post, it seems to vary from house to house, from the copper lamp at Divāli to the monthly pūjā at the new moon. It is a matter of personal piety as much as of financial means or family tradition.

B. The post found in certain temples[8] always has the same form and is made of the same material, but its dimensions vary considerably. It is difficult, in the absence of an extensive inventory, to say anything affirmative about it. But it would seem reasonable to propose, on the one hand, that it has the same geographic localization as its domestic counterpart, and on the other, that it is in one way or another an extension of it. Thus at the Nirākāra temple in Khalvaḍe village (still in Kāṇakoṇā Tk.),[9] an octagonal post embedded in a round cement base of three levels and painted red (plate 27) is found in the northeastern corner of the temple courtyard (the temple faces east): that is, in the most typical position of the *kṣetrapāla*. Still, its ritual role links it in a very particular way to the local Velipas (Nirākāra's priest is himself a Velipa). Every young Velipa must, in the first year of his marriage, attend the Nirākāra temple festival. Twelve days after Divāli the festival of the post, this time called Kātayā (pronounced Kātyā), takes place.[10] The temple is illumined by lamps. The post itself is surrounded by them, and a lamp is set on its top. Pūjā is performed to it and sweets are distributed. The actual festival of Nirākāra (the "One without Form") takes place three months later. It is then that newlywed couples must be present. On the first day, the young wife walks five times around the temple bearing a lamp on her head that she then places near the post. The pūjārī will remove it at the end of the day. The young husband, for his part, proceeds to the post the next day after having gone once around the temple. An iron needle is inserted beneath the skin of his back near the backbone. With this he circles the temple five times and returns before the post. The needle is removed (any Velipa can insert and remove it) and he rubs his back against the post, which has the effect of healing his wound. This is apparently a unique use of this post, but its symbolism is not without interest. One notices an apparent complementarity between the woman's and

[8]Pereira 1978 mentions only the domestic post.

[9]The case of Nirākāra raises another delicate problem that we will elude here, since the formal link with the post that concerns us is not established. It is a question of a wooden post that can be as high as two and a half meters, and distinguished above all by fine sculptures over the entire surface. The top is generally flat. One of the specimens observed is nothing more than a pillar serving to support a building. That of Khalvaḍe, much less elaborate, on the other hand evokes the top of a Pōtu Rāju twice repeated (plates 28, 29). Another is in the position of a *kṣetrapāla* in the maṇḍapa of the shrine to Bhūmipurusa, himself a guardian deity of the Mallikārjuna shrine in Śrīsthol. Finally, a post of the Nirākāra type is found in the Mallikārjuna temple in Gaondongre, to which the Brahman priests of the place refuse to give a name. Finely sculpted and of round section, it ends in a cone. It has an oracular function and the priests deny that it has any connection with the Śiva of the sanctuary, although it receives its small portion of the daily pūjā (plate 30).

[10]I am not sure whether this name might recall an unrecognizable and philologically desperate alteration of the term *kṣetrapāla*. Throughout the Goa area (notably, in the part called Novas Conquistas that includes Kāṇakoṇā) the latter appears in the most unexpected and least intelligible forms, betraying the deep disturbances that Hinduism underwent in this region during the sixteenth century. It should be added that the term *kātayā* is applied exclusively to this post.

man's roles.[11] The former is associated with fire, since she carries a lamp on her head—a way of transforming her into a "victim" (see below). Her husband must submit to the "torture" of the needle stuck beneath his skin, which clearly recalls the hook employed in hook-swinging. But if one is attentive to the form of the needle and the curative role of the post against which he must rub his back, it is not difficult to see in the lamp and the elongated needle a dissociation of the symbolism of Pōtu Rāju into a fire-element and a post-form. The lamp is the fire-husband of the young wife, who herself evokes the vedi and Agni (see above, pp. 37, 40). The rite, performed by young low-caste couples who cannot provide themselves with a Brahman and a sacrificial fire on their marriage day, could be a substitute for the high-caste ritual in which the milky-sapped post converts itself into flames from lamps and needles for torture (the post never totally losing its significance as an instrument of killing). This rite in the first year of marriage is complemented, the second year, by an ordeal of the same type in which the young husband, with a needle in his back, this time walks around the temple of Mallikārjuna in Śrīsthol (on the last day of the temple festival, the sixth day of the dark fortnight of Phālguna), followed by his wife who carries a lamp on her head. The rite conducted at the Velipa temple is authenticated by its repetition at the pure temple of Mallikārjuna (a form of Śiva). The Brahman priests there remain at a distance from the ceremony, however, and it is Velipas who get possessed—called by the transparent name *avatāra-puruṣa*—who insert and remove the needles.[12] It is likely that the marriage properly speaking took place in the presence of the domestic post. Its repetition, first at a caste temple, then at a pure temple with the mediation of possessed persons of low caste, follows a model already known to us: the low-caste head of a household cannot hope to participate in a sacrificial fire except in the capacity of the offered victim. He and his wife become bali-janas, living sacrificial offerings symbolized by the lamp and the needle. The possessed Velipas assume the role of the executioner and the Brahman priests can turn their backs to the victims' "execution," as they do in the Vedic sacrifice. They are, in effect, inside the temple during this time. The young couple's fate is not unrelated to that of Mahiṣa, alias the sacrificial buffalo.

This extension of a domestic ritual, however, is only a prelude to a ceremony on the same last day of the festival that is very similar in its deep structure. This final rite is again the prerogative of the Velipas. The participants arrive two days earlier bearing mobile posts surmounted by parasols, having danced and sung with their posts beneath a temporary canopy erected near the door of the main sanctuary, to the temple's northeast (the usual location of the kṣetrapāla at an east-facing temple). On the last day, the posts are still there, but held immobile on the ground, the possessed Velipas seated at their bases. The Velipa drummers from the temple lie down beneath the canopy around a fire upon which a pot of rice is boiling. Their heads are near the fire and each of them

[11]Other examples of the same nature may be seen in the districts of South Kanara, which is separated from Kānakoṇā by North Kanara.

[12]The Mallikārjuna temple in Śrīsthol offers a situation similar to that of the famous Jagannātha temple in Purī: the liṅga was discovered by the Velipas and they retain a particular place in the temple. There are three Velipa priests along with the Citpāvan Brahman priests, and for two months of the year the cult of Mallikārjuna is left to the heads of four Velipa families.

has a needle embedded beneath the skin of his right arm (blood must not appear). When the rice is ready, one of the Velipa priests from the temple cuts himself on the forehead and collects a little blood that he mixes with rice before tossing it onto the crowd. Should one of the participants become possessed, the avatāra-puruṣas "take upon themselves" this possession.

Once again, all the elements are present—fire, needles, and blood (the last two dissociated)—to symbolize the offering the Velipas make of themselves to the superior divinity. It is likely that the mobile posts (not provided, it seems, with the characteristic form of the top, but the mobile poles of Pōtu Rāju do not have that form either) represent the duplication of the permanent domestic posts: it is the Velipa households that thus offer themselves as victims, but by an offering that is well-controlled. The blood does not flow from the needles; the rice mixed with blood is thrown onto the crowd to cast the merits of the "sacrifice" onto the community. The foundation myth of the temple accounts in its own way for this limited blood rite: the Velipas discovered the liṅga of Mallikārjuna while clearing a forest, having wounded it with an axe. From the wound appeared blood and milk. It is evidently this milk that is found in the species of trees with milky sap that are chosen for the domestic posts, or for those at temples. The element of milk is to be seen in relation to the curative property of the small Velipa temple at Khalvaḍe (see above). I will soon attempt to give this ensemble an interpretation.

The Mallikārjuna temple at Śrīsthol includes no less than four kātayās. One, placed it seems by chance behind the guardian shrine of Bhūmipuruṣa, was erected by a Marāṭha Desāi family, landowners of the place, who must have emigrated from the adjacent district of North Kanara. It is not called *kātayā,* but rather Rāmacandrapuruṣa, derived from the name of the ancestor of the family that emigrated[13] (plate 33). The post is not just commemorative but an object of active worship. Every year in the month of Śrāvaṇ(a) (July-August) members of the family come each Monday to offer coconuts and lamps at the same time as the Citpāvan temple priests offer pūjā in the sanctuaries of Bhūmipuruṣa and Nirākāra.[14] Everything takes place as if Rāmacandrapuruṣa had witnessed the settling of the Marāṭha family in this place. He is like a substitute for the local domestic Puruṣa, the enlarged form of which he retains (about a meter and a half). Despite the name Rāmacandra, the kuladeva of this Marāṭha family, like all those in the region, is Mallikārjuna, a form of Śiva.

Another kātayā at the same temple is situated in an uncovered octagonal enclosure, which is rather pretentiously named *sabhā* (the local Koṅkanī term for which is *pernot*): this gathering place faces the Nirākāra sanctuary (above; n. 14). The kātayā occupies the southwestern corner, and a post with a lamp, blackened from oil and smoke, stands near, a witness to the worship offered to it (plate 34). According to a Citpāvan pūjārī, this kātayā is there to recall the pure character of the sabhā. Yet it probably has a more

[13]Along with the Velipas, the Marāṭhas constitute the largest clientele of the temple.

[14]It is this Nirākāra who is found in a hall that has in part been remade with heavy stone pillars. Nirākāra is the only wooden pillar in the building, no doubt the only one to remain from the original construction, or from the foundation post (?). It is treated as a god and the Citpāvans reserve his cult entirely for themselves. Cf. above, p. 78, n. 9.

precise function, but one that has become unfamiliar: would it not stand as the foundation post of the local collectivity (I dare not say, all the castes together), for which the sabhā is the place of assembly?

Very nearby, on a square base surmounted by little columns supporting a small roof, several aniconic stones are complemented by a small-sized kātayā (twenty-five centimeters above the base) in the southwestern corner (see plate 35). This is the place of worship reserved for Ādivāsis, that is, for people from the local tribes. It was impossible to learn more from the Brahman informant, but I cannot refrain from comparing this aedicule to the domestic shrines in which the foundation post is located next to the kuladeva.

Finally, the same Citpāvan Brahman also designates as a kātayā a stone post situated on a platform on the same axis as the Mallikārjuna sanctuary, but on the story above it. A borderline case, it is not known whether it is a question of a kātayā or Nirākāra. This is certainly a recent addition and its more specific function is of no concern. It could be in the position of the devotee-guardian, as with Pōtu Rāju, but it is upstairs and thus does not face the sanctuary. Moreover, Mallikārjuna, the main god, is already abundantly provided with guardians: with the shrine of Bhūmipuruṣa (an aniconic stone in the tradition of the kṣetrapālas that one finds in Goa), which is itself preceded by a Nirākāra of sculpted wood beneath his maṇḍapa. Again, to the right of the entrance to the maṇḍapa upon which the Mallikārjuna sanctuary (northeastern corner) opens is a small subshrine reserved for Bagilapāyakā, "the protector of the door," who is represented by a mounted warrior. There is thus justification for seeing in the stone kātayā one of those modern proliferations whose meaning is in large part emptied—one that speaks of a surplus of capital to be invested in the temple rather than of a liturgical necessity. The substitution of stone for wood is itself reason enough to call into question the post's significance.

C. Kāṇakoṇā is a district on the Goan coast that also includes a population of fishermen (Ambi, Khārvi, Gābit, etc.). Some of their boats are still sailing boats that fish to the south in the region of Khārvār, as well as along the Goan coast. These sailing boats have in their center a wooden post identical to the domestic post and, consequently, except for the material, identical to Pōtu Rāju (plates 31, 32). Separated from the mast by the bench across the middle (*mhālādi* [or *mhāḷādi?*]), it is fixed like the former in a thick wooden base (*āsthāmāna?*) that doubles the boat's keel, following the form of the ribs so as to distribute the stress from the mast. Above the bench, into which they are embedded, the mast and post are held tightly to each other by a strong rope wound several times around them (*vaḷaṇa rajju*), without however their touching each other at the post's top. The post is not functional in relation to the mast. Yet if one goes a little farther north, for example as far as Colva Beach, the same type of boat has this same post, but its characteristic head has disappeared. Around Panaji (formerly Panjim), apart from the fact that one finds little besides motorboats, the rare sailing boats that remain all belong to Christian fishermen (as is probably already the case at Colva Beach, since it is part of Velhas Conquistas), and a cross is sometimes found in place of the post.

I could thus justly ask several questions about this post, even if they could only address their point awkwardly, and without acquaintance with the technical aspects.

Notwithstanding some reticence, the responses were quick to come. Yes, this post was the replica of the one within the home. In the house, it is called *kalasa* (no doubt because of the pot—kalaśa—buried at its base), while in the boat it is called *bhoī*, that is, "land," and because *bhoī* belongs to the popular language, it could almost be translated as "terra firma."[15] It is the solid ground of the boat that, technically and ritually, must render it as safe as the mainland. But it is at the same time identical with Puruṣa and the kuladeva: here the distinction is no longer made between the god of the lineage and the foundation post (we have seen that the latter can be very close to the ancestor).

When the boat is being built, a golden nail is driven into the keel from the outside and set somewhat out of line with the post. The latter, for its part, is fixed in the āsthāmāna just prior to the boat's completion. Beneath it are put either the five metals mentioned for the domestic *kambha,* or a rupee. Here is a new foundation ritual that evinces the yūpa. A Brahman (no doubt an astrologer) is sent for to determine when the boat should be put to sea and what name it should be given. Before unfurling the sail for the first time, an ārati is performed to the post: probably an affirmation of its divinity, but also an association of the post with fire. The monsoon prevents fishing for several weeks every year. Before returning to sea, a pūjā is offered to the post and a coconut is opened for it (a rite that corresponds to the Coconut Day observed along the entire Konkan coast up to Mumbai, but the coconut is offered to the boat rather than to the sea).

The complementarity here between the two posts—one domestic and the other on a boat—provides a valuable indication of their underlying meaning. It cannot be by chance that a fisherman calls the post on his boat "terra firma" and the one at his house "pot." In the first case the stability of the post is accentuated at the boat's center of gravity, while in the second the sunken receptacle, container of precious objects, is explicitly designated, as if the post were forgotten. In order to compare the two objects and understand their relationship, it is necessary to recall that the posts are made of wood with milky sap, this being the characteristic common to the four utilizable species. The domestic post buried in a pot (or placed above it?) is analogous in its configuration to the churn, while the seagoing post bears the look of the staff for churning the ocean beneath it. From the milky sap one can only evoke the churning of the milk ocean, from which are born so many objects indispensable to the gods—and indirectly to men. The boat and the house are thus the privileged recipients of all the goods thereby produced. This churning is only one of the figures of the cosmic sacrifice, since it transforms the sea into clarified butter, food for the sacrificial fire and obligatory mediation of every production of riches.[16]

Moreover, if the seagoing posts helped to evince this mythical reference, they are certainly not the only ones to gain from it. Species with milky sap are sought for these

[15][French "le plancher des vaches," literally "the deck of cows" and figuratively *terra firma,* may intend an Indian resonance here that allows no idiomatic equivalent in English. Tr.] One must also see here the asuric and male doubling of the Earth, rather than Bhūmi herself. There is also a Bhoi caste of fishermen (Jackson 1976, xviii).

[16]Cf. MBh 1.17.12 (15.12) *kalaśodadhiḥ* and 18.32 (16.31) *kalaśa* to designate the ocean.

posts that evoke both torture and destruction (the mythic ocean is transformed into milk and then clarified butter thanks to the destruction of the trees, plants, and animals found on the mountain-churn), and also the emergence of a new and prosperous world that brings with it immortality for the gods and the moon that lends human life a rhythm of continuous movement. It will be seen that a latex-bearing tree is used at Nāgapaṭṭiṉam[17] for a hook-swinging post at the Māriyammaṉ festival. It is also from a latex-containing tree of a very closely related species that the devotees of Māriyammaṉ make the forked pole that serves as the low caste "husband" of the goddess during her annual festival in the village of Kaṉṉapuram.[18] One might even mention the post of *white* aṅkulo[19] hewn for the buffalo sacrifice at Carccikā in Orissa. The two latter examples lead back to the Goddess and the buffalo sacrifice, and thereby oblige us to posit a semantic equivalence between the śamī and trees with milky sap, or, more exactly, a probable exchange of meaning, since one passes thereby from the feminine to the masculine, from the śamī to the pipal, while preserving the same beneficial tonality. In effect, the milky sap (*kṣīra*, "milk") evokes semen—*śukra* (very close to *śukla*, "white")—at least as much as it elicits maternal milk. Although the Revelation does not mention it, the aśvattha is also a *Ficus* with milky sap, a *kṣīravṛkṣa*. Whereas the presence or absence of vegetal milk does not appear to play any role as regards the Vedic post,[20] it seems to have very quickly been sought to make the araṇis. Evidence is provided, for example, by a late text from the Taittirīya (of the Black YV) tradition, *Vaikhānasa-śrautasūtra* 1.1, which envisages the hypothetical situation where the pipal chosen for the araṇis has not grown on a śamī: "As far as possible an aśvattha that has grown on a śamī—*śamīgarbha*—is chosen. If it has not grown on a śamī, a tree (or: an aśvattha) is then chosen that has white branches—*śuklāṅkura*." It is difficult to prove that this śuklāṅkura would have directly inspired the *śveta-aṅkulo* or white aṅkulo of Carccikā, but nonetheless. . . . It is also not certain that this whiteness would immediately be perceived as that of milky sap. But whatever this particular instance of white might be, it is substituted for the śamī in order to express its properties, and this is indeed what occurs when trees with milky (or white) sap are chosen to make these various posts. To the radically destructive and fearsome nature of fire, each variation brings a beneficial and fertile connotation. Fecundity thus passes from the feminine breast to the male organ; the masculinity of the pipal prevails over the calming femininity of the śamī, but only to signify the same thing. Confirmation of this passage from the feminine to the masculine, from milk to semen, can be found in the epic myth of the birth of Śuka, son of Vyāsa and of the araṇi upon which the ascetic allowed his seed to fall at the sight of a beautiful nymph,[21] while he strove to produce a sacrificial fire by the customary means of friction. This time, it is semen and not the ocean's milk that is churned and Śuka ("Parrot," destined

[17]See below, p. 125.

[18]Cf. Beck 1981, and below, pp. 164 ff., for other sites in Kongunad.

[19]See above, p. 69. The white aṅkulo is reserved for the post employed for the buffalo, whereas ordinary goat sacrifices require only a post made of aṅkulo. It is, however, not known what distinguishes the white variety from the other.

[20]The udumbara is a *kṣīravṛkṣa*, but the khadira is not.

[21]MBh 12.324.1-11 (311.1-11).

to faithfully repeat the Vedas communicated by his father) is called Āraṇeya, "having the araṇi for mother." The inversion of the genders within one and the same symbolism accounts, among other things, for the choice of a tree containing latex to represent the low caste "husband" of Māriyammaṉ.[22] Is one so very far from Pōtu Rāju?

The Goan facts as a whole, notwithstanding the interesting law of transformation that they bring to light between the śamī and trees with milky sap, no doubt raise more questions than they resolve. In particular, one might ask why this form reappears here, far from Āndhra and near the districts of South and North Kanara, where other transpositions of the yūpa are seen that cannot be derived from those of Āndhra.[23] There must be an historical explanation, but we are for now reduced to hypotheses. The net gain of the long detour we have just made along the western coast of the Deccan lies in its evidence of the foundation rituals of this particular form of post, which was not forthcoming on the eastern coast. Moreover, the fact that a derivative of the Vedic yūpa can serve as a foundation post constitutes an important link in the chain leading from the Vedic animal sacrifice to foundation sacrifices involving blood that modern India has not yet completely forgotten. The little golden *puruṣa* of the ritual could lead to real, and not merely symbolic, human sacrifice. One cannot hold this supplement of information in reserve in attempting to unravel the complex symbolism that gives shape and meaning to Pōtu Rāju. His relationship to the yūpa has become more evident thanks to the foundation ritual. But the domestic post and *Caṇḍeśa* (see n. 23) have drawn attention away from the Goddess. The function of guardian deity and Caṇḍeśa's relationship to Śiva would make their affinity with the yūpa even more immediate than with Pōtu Rāju. Whatever the historical vicissitudes that have left these posts in both the eastern and western Deccan, they do not seem to be connected by a process of geographical diffusion. They are two parallel utilizations of a single ritual and plastic heritage, two well-differentiated variants that enrich it accordingly.

We are thus able to return now to the buffalo sacrifice that is associated with Pōtu Rāju better equipped to attempt to decipher its essential moments, those which have

[22]Shulman 1980, 94 mentions a marriage rite among the non-Brahmans of Mysore in which a *nerale* branch with red sap is "married" to a *kalli* branch with milky sap. Regarding the opposition of milk and blood, or of semen and blood, and the utilization of trees with milky sap, see Shulman 1980, where an entire chapter is devoted to it (93-110 and n. 89, p. 378). Shulman emphasizes sexual connotations and those of pure and impure, of the cool and burning, leaving in the background the link with the Vedic sacrifice and the classical tradition derived from it. The Tamil documentation, ethnographic and textual, is particularly rich. Cf. also O'Flaherty 1980, chap. 2, whose view is similar. In both cases, the specifically Hindu context is somewhat sacrificed to apparently more universal and psychological considerations.

[23]A few other rare stone posts should be mentioned here that are very close in form to Pōtu Rāju and the Tamil stone post. These are found in Mahārāṣtra in Śiva temples (plates 36, 37). There is a representation of Caṇḍeśa, whose significance is much less active than in Tamilnadu. His function as *nirmālyadevatā* is unknown, which in the south permits him to receive offerings rendered impure by their contact with Śiva. One knows only not to discontinue the circumambulation of the temple when reaching him and to set off again in the opposite direction. He is also displaced in relation to his Tamil homologue: always situated near the door of the main sanctuary, to the right and consequently in the northeastern corner. Nor can one account for this new erratic formation. The feature that appears to rejoin all these variants with the yūpa-Pōtu Rāja is the "terrible" aspect of the deity he represents—guardian, protector, and thus warrior; one also catches an echo of the baneful character of the yūpa, and of the warrior vocation of the buffalo-king.

figured as constants in the descriptions gathered in the field and from the ethnographic literature.

B. Attempt at Interpretation

A. The Pōtu Rāju post is of either octagonal or round section, and it cannot be said that one would be technically more elaborated than the other. The option has no doubt a symbolic basis irrespective of why one form would be chosen over the other for a given post. The yūpa is very generally octagonal (a form that relates it to the eight spatial directions, like the portion of the liṅga that corresponds to Viṣṇu). One could perhaps seek a connection between the round form and that of the gārhapatya fire in the solemn sacrifice, but that would be rather artificial in the present context. The form of the male araṇi, on the other hand, suggests itself more immediately, since it entails the condensation in one and the same symbol of the feminine component (provided by the śamī) and the masculine component of the araṇis. There is thus a veritable option between the two forms of the section of the post, as also seems to be the case in Orissa. The stambhadeva in Goa must, on the contrary, be octagonal if, as its name indicates, it is to evoke the yūpa (*stambha,* "post," being one of the numerous terms that can be symbolically substituted for *yūpa*).

Besides the stationary Pōtu Rāju, there are also mobile ones: first of all certain possessed persons, but also the pole he carries. Certainly this pole, generally of bamboo, is another figure of the post, as one can represent a human outline on it, that of the puruṣa-victim-and-sacrificer who is like the fundamental measurement unit of the Vedic yūpa. Its adornment with neem evidently has an appeasing effect, analogous to the śamī, at the same time as it indicates a link with the goddess. Now the Vedic yūpa also has its mobile double, the *svaru* (see above, pp. 35, 41-42 and n. 14), which is passed through the belt of grass around the post (analogous to the belt of the sacrificer-warrior). Using the *svaru* together with the knife for jointing and carving, the adhvaryu touches the animal's horns, which had been previously anointed with ghee. The Vedic svaru, figure of the post, symbolizes the instrument of torture and symbolically accomplishes the putting to death by the adhvaryu, before the executioner does his work. The pole of Pōtu Rāju is that, but also the victim-sacrificer, and it also becomes mobile as does the victim (see below).

The position of Pōtu Rāju, facing the entrance to the shrine of the goddess, makes him not only her devotee, but also a guardian of his elder sister. He fulfills, when all is said and done, the function of what is called a *kṣetrapāla* in the great temples, the guardian of the territory over which the goddess reigns. In a large part of the Deccan (especially in Mahārāṣṭra), this type of guardian deity functioning as a warrior is indicated by his red lead coating (this is especially the case of Mhasobā). The color red evokes *rajas*, the cosmic principle of activity, as well as the status of a warrior king.[24] Here, however, this function is veiled, rendered more ambiguous by the wood of the śamī to which no color is applied. This, however, follows a certain logic. If the śamī

[24]But red also evokes menstrual blood, the impurity associated with the female condition.

has appeasing symbolism, one must not forget its "original" ambiguity that recalls the parallel evolution of the śamī in other regions of India, where it becomes a representation of the victorious Goddess on the occasion of Vijayādaśamī.[25] She "appeases" by extinguishing the fire as well as by killing the enemy. She reserves her peace for those who worship her, but unleashes her weapon of fire (and of war) whenever the need arises. But this guardian function also means that Pōtu Rāju remains outside the temple of the goddess, although still within her enclosure if there is one; he is in any case included in the circumambulation of the temple that the buffalo and the entire procession perform before proceeding to the sacrifice. He is thus the intermediary between the interior and the exterior, the screen in both directions, so to speak. This is the position of the Vedic yūpa which, set astride the boundary of the sacrificial area, assures the passage between the consecrated and pure precinct and the exterior, where impure works take place.

However, this analysis holds only for the Pōtu Rāju of boundary temples.[26] One must not forget that there is another Pōtu Rāju situated at the center of the village, at the heart of daily activities and of the internal relations of the local society. The function of guardian is thus less perceptible, but while he is on the boundary, he repels the possible enemy, who always threatens; conversely, at the center he ensures the locally reigning dharma.

B. It is in the central location that Pōtu Rāju is inseparable from the pipal or the neem-pipal couple. It is more than probable that where the pipal is alone, it has smothered the accompanying neem. However, one can only note the location of the śamī post at the foot of the pipal, śamī below and pipal above, which evokes Purūravas's pan of fire in the ŚPB and the Purūravas-Urvaśī couple in the TS.[27] One need not hesitate: here what dominates is the function of the sacrificial fire with the appeasing function constituted by the śamī. Located at the center of the village, the ensemble watches over its internal order and good fortune, and its presence is above all beneficial. However, this is not strictly speaking a place of worship, apart from the grāmadevatā festival. Pōtu Rāju claims nothing for himself, no more than the pipal, it appears, and it is their presence alone that is reassuring. At the same time, it is known that Pōtu Rāju cannot be considered independently of his cultic rapport with the goddess of the boundary. But here, let me repeat, the benevolent character entirely effaces the "terrible" aspect that is attached to the outer temple and its guardian. And all this would be unintelligible were one not to see therein the symbolic permanence of a well-controlled sacrificial fire, and thus a substitute for a regular and beneficial sacrificial activity of the entire local community.

Space permits only a few thoughts regarding the well-known pan-Indian theme of the marriage of trees, of which a derived form is marriage *with* a tree (by a person, a prop-

[25]That already transpired in the śamīpūjā of Vijayavādā. See above, p. 25, and also below, pp. 288 ff.

[26]The name Pōtu Rāju is also used to designate a manner of scarecrow made of rags and placed in the fields to protect the harvests. It is big-bellied and ithyphallic.

[27]Above, pp. 50-51. I encountered only once the real combination of a pipal and a śamī; the pipal was in full vigour, the śamī half-dead. See below, p. 259.

erty, a harvest, etc.).[28] Best known is the pipal-neem couple, in which, based on what we now know, it is not difficult to recognize a substitute for the pipal-śamī pair. Given the well-known association of the neem tree with the Goddess, the feminine character of the tree, notwithstanding its masculine name, is beyond doubt. Neem trees grow abundantly throughout south India, where pipal-neem "marriages" are beyond counting. However, one knows other formations that are closer to the schema imparted in the Vedic Revelation, with the two trees now as substitutes for the recommended species: in Telangana one frequently finds in the fields a palmyra (*Borassus flabellifer*, wine palm) whose trunk appears to thrust upward from the middle of a banyan that grows around it and progressively envelopes it with its aerial roots (plate 38). The farm-workers consulted acknowledged that they sought to obtain this coupling because it is auspicious. Here, the *Borassus*, with its high straight trunk, is evidently the male tree, while the banyan that grows in breadth, horizontally rather than vertically as a result of its aerial roots, takes on a feminine value. It appears, however, that in Orissa, where the neem is rare, the banyan is associated as the feminine partner of the pipal.[29] At this level, the Vedic symbolism has long been lost from view, just as in the rites that involve marriage with a tree. It is nonetheless remarkable that this would be the oldest brahmanical tradition to have left a mark extending to the "natural" Indian landscape, even if more local or popular beliefs and practices also find their place, and indeed reinterpret the Vedic symbolism.

C. Turning to the ritual treatment of the victim, one is led to relate several of its aspects to the Vedic sacrifice—to all the forms of animal sacrifice of course, but perhaps also more specifically to the royal ritual par excellence, the aśvamedha. One must not be surprised that this is the case, considering the particular status of the goddess who receives the buffalo sacrifice:[30] the protectress of a royal dynasty, or more modestly, of a village.

The first thing to note is the one-year period that appears in different forms: in Ṣoḷāpur (Mahārāṣṭra), for example, when several buffalo are available for the sacrifice, one chooses the victim for the following year the very day of the sacrifice, and a ring is put on one of its horns or through its nostrils as a sign of its consecration. From then

[28]This is not the place to give a bibliography on the subject. One may refer notably to Mohapatra 1979, 73-74, and Gupta 1965, app. I. Regarding marriage with a tree, cf. Crooke 1968, 115, Sleeman 1915, 31.

[29]Mohapatra notes that in Rājasthān the neem is masculine. This is to be verified. I shall allow myself to suggest here another parallel, this time classical, and a possible substitution of the banyan for the śamī. The symbolism of the śamī has already been noted in MBh 4.5 (above, p. 55, n. 49), in which the tree serves as a hiding place for the Pāndavas' weapons, notably the most celebrated among them, the bow Gāṇḍīva (one knows that the arrows of the bow and the flames of fire are mutually symbolic). In *Harivaṃśa* 2.14.7-11 (58.7-11), a scene from Krsna's childhood unites him with his brother Balarāma and others among the cowherd children beneath the thick foliage of the banyan Bhāṇḍīra (note the assonance Bhāṇḍīra-Gāṇḍīva) which, like the śamī in the MBh, stands on the summit of a mountain in the center of Vrndāvana. In this banyan's shade, the young cowherds play war games, and this period of their lives is assimilated to a dīkṣā (like that of the Pāndavas among the Matsyas, once their weapons are confided to the śamī). Cf. Biardeau 1978, 212: the name Bhāṇḍīra is not clear (*bhāṇḍa* is a receptacle, like the fire pan of Purūravas that becomes a śamī).

[30]One must perhaps make exception of the buffalo sacrifices offered by the low castes to their goddess in their quarter, as is still seen in Mahārāstra and Karṇāṭaka. That goddess, however, is always only a "vassal" or a younger sister of the other.

on, this buffalo wanders at will and is fed and tended to by one and all.[31] The Vedic victim is always treated with consideration, since it is essential that it consents to its immolation, but the period of a year recalls the wandering of the sacrificial horse accompanied by the Kṣatriyas to remove obstacles. Everywhere the buffalo goes, the sovereignty of its owner, the goddess, is recognized.[32] In Nasik, the buffalo that was victorious in the annual buffalo combat was also left to its own devices and considered for one year as a divine being, fed and well treated by the entire local community.[33] Even in Āndhra, where the periodicity of the sacrifice has become less regular after having once been performed annually, the notion remains of a "wandering" sacrificial buffalo. This is spontaneously expressed, for example, by the villagers of Nunna,[34] who thereby explain the long procession of the buffalo and the ambulatory Pōtu Rājus (both the intoxicated bearer and the pole) who precede the goddess's chariot. It is a kind of tour of the settlement's boundaries, to which each house goes with its offering, thereby recognizing the goddess's sovereignty. One must not confuse this visit by the sovereign of her states with the nocturnal processions that accompany the buffalo's severed head.

During the entire preparation of the sacrifice—which most of the time was performed at the center of the village beneath the renowned pipal sheltering Pōtu Rāju and in the presence of temporary clay images of the goddess—music was played, notably drums producing great amounts of noise during the procession, the possession scenes, and the pūjā. The clamor abruptly ends at the moment of immolation: the silence is and must be total. Most important, however, is certainly the silence of the victim itself, and this is noted by the villagers at the time. In Mallavaram, after the second buffalo sacrifice has been offered at the center of the village, and during the second nocturnal procession that will cast the head of the victim and the clay image of the goddess beyond the boundaries of the territory,[35] the man possessed by Pōtu Rāju (who, according to our interpretation, is identical with the buffalo demon and the buffalo victim) scourges himself with a whip and emits not a sound. Should he speak or cry out, all would be lost for the village and the world. It is even said that he is at that time incapable of speech. One learns further that in the ritual sacrifice of goats and rams, it is common to seek an indication of the animal's consent (or of its acceptance by the goddess, which for participants is one and the same), for example in the form of a slight trembling (not to be confused with snorting) after the sprinkling of water. One recognizes without difficulty an echo of the Vedic concern to reduce to a minimum the baneful repercussions of the putting to death: the victim must consent to its immolation and neither struggle nor be

[31]It is at this point that I am inclined to make a comparison with the manner in which the Khonds treat their *meria,* young people adopted and raised by the community as beloved children until the day they are chosen for human sacrifice. Cf. Macpherson 1865, 113ff.

[32]Above, pp. 27-28 and n. 28, with the variation current in Karnātaka where the buffalo represents the low caste husband of the goddess. The sacrifice having transformed her into a widow, three days later one chooses the buffalo for the coming year to give her another husband. The buffalo that has been consecrated also receives a particular treatment by the community.

[33]Above, p. 30.

[34]Above, pp. 10-11.

[35]Above, p. 20.

heard to make a sound. The silence is interpreted positively as acquiescence, and the victim is promised the highest of destinies (while awaiting the salvation accorded by the Goddess!).[36]

The sacrifice is usually completed by decapitation, although one finds cases in which the throat is slit. Once this occurs, the continuation of the festival is everywhere practically the same, and variations tend toward simplification of the procedures, and thus towards a certain degradation of their symbolism, which probably ceased to be conscious long ago. The eyes and the entire head of the victim are covered with fat taken from its body, the right foreleg is severed and put crosswise in its mouth, and finally, before being presented to the goddess, a lamp is placed on its head. One should above all note that the offering of the head to the goddess is not a general feature of the buffalo sacrifice. It is found in the great royal temples in Orissa (with exceptions that seem to signify that the buffalo is not directly offered to the goddess) and in Rājasthān. On the other hand, in Tamilnadu the flesh of the animal is distributed to those who will consume it, without any part of it being shown to the goddess; or indeed the whole buffalo is buried in front of the shrine.[37] Moreover, the buffalo sacrifice there is dissociated both from Pōtta Rājā (the Tamil equivalent of Pōtu Rāju) and from the stone post that assumes his form (but in Rājasthān too, notably in Jaipur, the post is absent and the head is brought to the goddess in the temple). One would be tempted to see a correlation, at the village level, between the presence of Pōtu Rāju with his complex symbolism, which originates in Vedic ritual, and the offering of the head to the deity (it is often laid down in front of the door to the sanctuary, but outside; that is to say, it is shown to the goddess from a distance, no doubt so as not to defile her).

It is in any case probably methodologically sound to treat the fat spread on the head and the lamp placed on the top of the head together. In Ṣoḷāpur, it is still certified that the lamp is made from a mixture of flour kneaded together with the victim's entrails. In Āndhra, Elmore (1925, 17) speaks of a lamp fueled by fat taken from the victim. From there, one moves on to the flour lamp or the terra-cotta bowl, by far the most frequently utilized form in recent sacrifices. But there is hardly a doubt that at an early (?) date the animal's fat entered one way or another into the making of the lamp, which resulted in its direct consumption by the fire. For in the Vedic sacrifice, the animal's omentum and a portion of its fat were offered directly into the fire, and the remainder was cooked for consumption by the human participants. The victim's fat alternated with melted butter in feeding the fire, that is, the gods to whom the sacrifice was offered; it was the portion of the gods. The lamp and the fat placed together on the buffalo's head thus *together* represent a substitute for this Vedic homa.

As for the right leg that is severed and placed in the victim's mouth, its significance has often been considered. The most frequent conjecture is that it signifies humility, the victim's submission to its fate and to the deity, an expiation of its sins. This is certainly

[36]The practice in the Himalayan regions, including Nepal, of prolonging the animal's suffering in some places in an attempt to obtain its moaning, is perhaps to be interpreted as an additional feature of inversion (see below).

[37]One will have an example below of the first procedure in Māḍuvettimaṅgalam, while the second was practiced in Ambakarattūr (Pondicherry State).

not unrelated to what the rite in effect expresses, but it hardly helps to explain its concrete modalities. One will recall (above, pp. 41-42) that the Vedic *paśu* was fettered with a grass rope. The latter was passed around the left foreleg, then around the neck, and wound several times around the right horn before being attached to the upper end of the post or its grass belt (hence at mid-height, which accounts for certain procedures in Orissa). When the animal was untied from the post to be put to death, which took place a little further away, it remained fettered. The animal probably moved about with difficulty, the neck held forward by the rope tied to its leg. Is this a sign of an ancient practice of decapitation, a posture facilitating strangulation or suffocation by preventing the victim from struggling, or simply a sign of submission? We will never know, but for present purposes, there seems to have been a clear enough transition from the mode of hobbling the Vedic animal to the offering of the head with its foreleg. That it is the right rather than the left foreleg may have been a conscious inversion from the beginning—which would at the same time account for aberrant cases: notably that of the two forelegs placed in the buffalo's mouth in Ṣoḷāpur (above, p. 28). In the latter case, one passes from the fettered foot of the animal sacrificed to the two legs in the animal's mouth, offered, it would appear, in reply to the putting to death of Duryodhana in the MBh (9.58.44-48 [57.41-54]). Duryodhana offended Draupadī with his left thigh during the episode in the sabhā, but Bhīma subsequently broke both his thighs with his club. Mahiṣāsura, like Duryodhana, lost his realm and his life and the possibility of supporting heaven and earth. In certain Himālayan kingdoms, the Rājpūts sever the four legs of the buffalo with a single blow before putting it to death. To move from the Vedic situation to that in Āndhra, one might even invoke the mediation of the method practiced in Ṣoḷāpur (ibid.), where the ring passed around the animal's horn or through its nostrils at the time of its consecration serves to fetter it at the moment of sacrifice, when one passes a cord through it to attach it to the two forelegs so as to draw the neck forward, a convenient means of preparing the victim for the executioner's blow. The rope that fetters the animal belongs among the instruments of torture, as does the belt of grass on the post, or both together. The rope provides the two essential attributes of the pot-rāj, the *pot* and the whip, which are themselves analogous in form, one end thicker than the other, as is also the case for the grass girdle of the Vedic yūpa. The *pot* and its consecrated ashes draw the symbolism to the side of fire, while the whip is more evocative of the torture post. We have seen not only the Pot-rāj of Ṣoḷāpur whipping himself (above, p. 28), but also one of the possessed of Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra (above, p. 21). Flagellation is one of the forms taken by "human sacrifice," and for the person embodying the buffalo demon to have submitted to it is a logical priority. But its sacrificial (rather than penitential) aspect is evidently reinforced if it is truly a transformation of a Vedic instrument of sacrifice. Mutatis mutandis, the offering of the buffalo's head with its leg in its mouth recalls the same sacrificial schema. In one case it is the grass cord, in the other the posture of the animal that are redeployed.

D. I would like here to propose another rapprochement between the Vedic sacrifice and the buffalo sacrifice: one that no doubt holds also for the "āgamic" sacrifices in temples of the major gods of bhakti. This is to be done circumspectly, knowing that other elements can come into play, and keeping in mind the complete structure of the sacrifice, with the displacement of the boundary temple to the Pōtu Rāju of the village

center, where the goddesses who receive sacrifice are regularly temporary images ordered for the occasion from the potter, and eventually carried by him during the rite and cast beyond the village bounds with the buffalo's head at the rite's end. On a different scale, it is still a temporary Durgā in wax or clay that is the object of popular worship in Bengal; an earthen jar filled with water (there can be up to sixty-four such jars) appears nearly everywhere in India for Navarātri (even in temples provided with an utsavamūrti), and all these representations of the deity are destined to disappear once the festival has ended, the most common mode of destruction being their immersion in a river. The same applies to the Gaṇeśapūjā. At first glance, one thinks of an annual renewal of the deity that would correspond to the periodic rites for the reaffirmation of its power, or of the expulsion of the evil of the foregone year. But this is not a very good explanation, since the worshipped mūrti remains during this time unmovable in its shrine. One could also think that the temporary goddess is the one that could be defiled through attendance at the sacrifice, without that entailing consequences for the sanctuary itself and its permanent image. But where, as in Orissa, the victim's head is brought into the interior of the temple, the goddess's earthen jar is placed directly before the statue, and the rite is followed by a purificatory cleaning of the premises and bathing of the deity without any particular problem being posed. It would thus seem that the true "reasons" would have to lie elsewhere. Moreover, the permanence of Pōtu Rāju is directly opposed to the provisional character of the mūrti of the goddess connected with the buffalo sacrifice and the Durgāpūjā (whether or not these last two events take place on the same date).

The parallelism with the Vedic ritual of animal sacrifice is evident: all the instruments of sacrifice, beginning with the post, the sacrificial terrain, etc., are made or installed for the occasion and are not intended to be lasting. One of the difficulties encountered by the historian of ancient brahmanism is that the sacrifice required no permanent structure, no durable object. There are, however, two relative exceptions, or perhaps just one: the sacrificer's araṇis that he keeps throughout his life, or at least as long as they can be used to kindle a fire, and . . . the yūpa, which is left standing at the edge of what was the sacrificial area after everyone has withdrawn. Naturally, none of these have survived, but one may suppose that they gradually disappeared, worn away by inclement weather, giving rise to the practice of fashioning commemorative posts of stone. Is there not a recollection of this Vedic practice in the buffalo sacrifice, for which all must be newly made, beginning with the images of worship, but in which Pōtu Rāju, embodying both the yūpa and the araṇis, is allowed to remain until his natural disappearance?[38]

It has not, of course, been our intention in comparing these details to suggest that the buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess was nothing more than a duplication, a mere copy of the Vedic sacrifice. That would be absurd, all the more so since such an assertion would leave undiminished, or even raise to full force, the formidable problem posed by the

[38]This leaves aside the question of the grains that are germinated in darkness during the festival. The shoots are uprooted, either to be immersed in a tank or distributed to the participants. The connection with Vedic ritual probably exists, but it is not immediately evident. This rite, moreover, goes well beyond worship of the Goddess and is found, for example, also in marriage ceremonies.

symbolic threads spun between the two. Why did what was once a sacrifice to the Vedic gods of heaven become a sacrifice to the Goddess? Perhaps the question can be cautiously formulated in historical terms: did the sacrifice of the buffalo[39] to the Goddess correspond to the disappearance of the practice of solemn Vedic sacrifices with their animal victims? But the real historical correlations cannot be verified: the MBh celebrates an aśvamedha but speaks of the Goddess who is fond of buffalo blood.[40] The two texts are perhaps not contemporaneous, but how is that to be established? Moreover, the dates of the commemorative stone posts of the oldest Vedic sacrifices (all in Rājasthān)—as determined by their inscriptions—come from the beginning of the second to the fourth century AD.[41] But the post in Jājpur (see above, p. 59, n. 5) is clearly more recent (and is found at the point where construction is said to have begun for a temple consecrated to the Goddess!). In fact, it cannot be doubted that the two types of ritual would have coexisted for several centuries, and one would love to know if any connections existed between them.[42] One must recognize that we know nothing about this matter and are once again driven to the structural. Yet this is far from being a last resort, since in any case neither the historic transfer from the Vedic gods to the Goddess nor the concomitance of the two rituals imparts meaning.

Already at the level of myth there is the same kind of relay. But there is a significant mediation when one passes from the etiological myths of the Brāhmaṇas, in which the sacrifice and what one may acquire from it form the stakes in the battle between the devas and asuras, to that of the DM, in which the gods, including the great gods of the Trimūrti, confide to the Goddess the task of vanquishing the demons and reestablishing them in their rights. The cause of the gods is clearly identified with the reign of dharma, of the sociocosmic order that allows the world to subsist without cataclysm. But between the two mythic situations another is known that appears to be historically intermediate, since it is already illustrated in the epic, but also presents itself as structurally midway

[39]One retains only the buffalo sacrifice, of which the ritual always includes the goat sacrifices, because it is the only one in which the evocation of the Vedic sacrifice would be pertinent. On the other hand, we have seen that it was modified by significations of its own that votive sacrifices of goats or cocks do not have. Finally, the buffalo is exclusively reserved for the Goddess, whereas lower meat-eating gods also consume goats and cocks.

[40]I do not, of course, forget (Biardeau 1979) that the hymns to the Goddess have been expurgated from the Poona Critical Edition as having been of a later date, but I also do not forget that there are representations from the Kushan period (second century AD) of the Goddess who slays the Buffalo Demon intended for domestic worship, which is not so bad as the first datable reference point, whether those who trouble over so much spilled blood like it or not. But what is one to say about the battle: and will one also expurgate passages because Krsna comes to the assistance of the killers of Drona, Jayadratha, Karna and several others?

[41]Chhabra 1947, 78-79.

[42]A detail of the mythic Indian countryside attracts attention, in particular in south India, but also certainly in a general manner. All the places that are related to episodes in the MBh (apart from the numerous caves where the Pāṇḍavas stayed during their forest exile) are occupied by temples to goddesses. This is the case for events relating to the kingdom of Virāṭa (including the site of the śamī where even the proximity to a cremation ground is not lacking) in Koṅgunād (Koṅkunātu, in Tamilnadu), as well as for the encounter between Śiva the hunter and Arjuna (at Vijayavādā, in Andhra Pradesh). But one will see that the relation between the epic myth and the Goddess is, in fact, of a different order, and does not witness to that rapport in a way that would satisfy a search for historical traces.

if one considers the HV, the first text in which Viṣṇu, about to "descend" among men in the form of his avatāra Kṛṣṇa, explicitly calls his sister to his aid. This is not the place to enter into a long analysis of these reference points in classical myth, even if one must stay in touch with them; such a discussion must be reserved for a more extensive study centered on the Goddess. It is, however, remarkable that one initially finds no intelligible relation between the Vedic battle of the devas and asuras for immortality, soma, or the sacrifice, and the clash of the Goddess with Mahiṣa in the DM. On the other hand, one perceives a much more distinct relation between the HV and the DM: the battle between the devas and asuras has clearly become the mythic analogue of the efforts, ritual or otherwise, undertaken by men to uphold the sociocosmic order. Viṣṇu takes incarnation in Kṛṣṇa only to reestablish order on earth, and his task—more in the HV than in the MBh—is above all that of a warrior ridding the earth of asuras who have incarnated with the desire to disrupt all things to their own advantage. The sister of Viṣṇu has apparently only a secondary role—which is, moreover, of a sacrificial nature since she must substitute herself for her brother as the victim of Kaṃsa. The Goddess of the DM, for her part, appears to be purely and simply substituted for the avatāra of Viṣṇu, not of her own initiative but at the behest of the gods and of Viṣṇu himself. The transition one seeks to understand from Vedic ritual to buffalo sacrifice must take account of this bellicose character of the Goddess—as has already been noted for the grāmadevatā and for the kuladevīs of kings.

But we haven't forgotten the little wooden post, our point of departure for this entire inquiry. We must thus return to the ritual that includes it, that is, to the buffalo sacrifice offered to the grāmadevatās of Āndhra, in order to advance our understanding of it. It is worthwhile now to recapitulate the inversions that developed in passing from the Vedic ritual to this buffalo sacrifice, inversions in which one senses that they are too fundamental to be of a purely formal order. An hypothesis, now already formulated, is that they inscribe themselves together in a complete restructuring of the notion and practice of sacrifice. I will not hesitate to appeal to classical (and not only Vedic) souvenirs to clarify certain traits of popular ritual, since the transformation of the feminine divinity into a warrior Goddess effectuates itself so well in classical myth and ritual. But it is Pōtu Rāju who remains at the center of this recapitulation of the facts that we have grouped around him.

The first inversion to be observed concerns the person of the sacrificer and what flows from him for the sacrifice itself. On the surface, however, the change is minimal. Theoretically, the yajamāna of the Vedic sacrifice is any member of the three higher varṇas; but one knows that the ideal sacrificer of the Brāhmaṇas is in fact the Kṣatriya, prince and warrior, holder of wealth, whose salvation here on earth and in the other world is linked to his sacrificial performance and the generosity toward Brahmans that it entails. Now the buffalo sacrifice to the grāmadevatā is by rule presided over by the head of the local community, traditionally a rāja, village headman and president of the pañcāyat, or grand landowner who possesses the totality or quasi-totality of the grāma's land. This local chief, who can thus also be the local representative of the central power (that is, in reality, the regional power), is analogous to the king who offers the buffalo sacrifice in his capital of Orissa or elsewhere. Of course, where it is a case of such grāmadevatās, the main officiant is never a Brahman and Brahmans will not be the main

beneficiaries of the sacrificer's munificence. But the essential difference lies elsewhere. On the Vedic, or more precisely brahmanic, level, to the extent that it is a question of a form of sacrifice that continues well beyond the Vedic period but follows the same principles, the sacrifice is always individual. Whether prince, Vaiśya or Brahman, one's resolution to perform a sacrifice is always related to a personal desire that the efficacy of the sacrifice should fulfill. It is a question only of his salvation after death, the stability of his reign (and not of his kingdom), of his wealth, etc. Whether the sacrificer would be a couple or the master of the house alone, nothing is changed. This probably corresponds to a religious organization of the universe in which the pantheon is vigorously structured, as G. Dumézil has clearly shown, and in which human society is no less organized, where evil lies everywhere in wait as indicated by the countless ritual precautions, but where a comprehensive vision structuring time and space appears to be lacking. One would, for example, have great difficulty in assigning to the asuras and devas their respective abodes; these two categories of invisible beings, who are chronically at war, curiously even exchange their qualities.[43] Large expanses of darkness loom over the abode of the dead and over their exact fate, as over the manner in which the respective sovereignties of Indra, Varuṇa, Yama, etc. are configured. When the prince sacrifices, when the Brahman officiates, they are each aware of integrating themselves into a universe that preexists them and in which they can change nothing, but to which they must adapt themselves as best they can for their own happiness. In the brahmanic world, desire is king.[44]

That is no longer the issue in the buffalo sacrifice to the goddess. The one who presides does so as head of the local community, and it is he who is the veritable sacrificer. One notices this especially in the manner in which the victim is procured: a collection is made in the entire village; the buffalo is offered by the traditional chief; votive buffalo are from simple individuals, one of which is drawn by lot. The inversion is complete because not only does one go from the one to the many, but the category of the sacrificer is applied collectively to all locally represented castes, including the lowest.[45] It should be noted that certain elements of the ritual[46] indicate that the community is opposed to the rest of the world, at least inasmuch as it seeks to integrate itself into it. At a quite down-to-earth level, the community conceives of the universe as comprised of antagonisms, of "factions," at least as regards what immediately surrounds it. What lies beyond its bounds, or what comes from outside, can only be a potential danger. That is probably why the annual buffalo sacrifice, which is inscribed in a regular and cyclical conception of time and is not subject to local vicissitudes, can without difficulty give way to a periodic sacrifice at greater intervals, above all as a result of natural

[43]On this question, cf. Kuiper 1979: the most complicated case being that of Varuna.

[44]Cf. Biardeau 1972 and 1981c.

[45]Something of this situation is to be found in all the great temples of pan-Indian or regional gods with the function of the *dharmakartā* (the name explains itself), which is opposed to the function of the officiating priests, and which is often assumed by a "rāja" or a member of the locally dominant caste. Similarly, the (vegetarian) sacrifice with oblations to the fire offered during the annual festival, or as votive offerings in the same temples, no longer corresponds to a personal desire, but is made "for the welfare of the worlds," even if this does not preclude that the offerer would hope for additional merit in return.

[46]For example, the sacrifice made to the śaktis: see above, pp. 12, 15-17.

calamities such as diseases or drought. These are among the most tangible manifestations of disturbed relations with the invisible world. The buffalo sacrifice to the grāmadevatā is thus a way for the local collectivity to regulate relations with the invisible portion of the outside world in which it integrates itself. This does not preclude the inhabitants' taking part individually in annual pilgrimages in the vicinity or within the locality itself (as was observed in Agiripalli and Maṅgalagiri, pilgrimage centers for Narasiṃha). Here they are aware of integrating themselves in a much vaster universe over which the god rules, a universe in which order must be upheld and to which one must conform. The rapport of such journeys with the worship of the goddess is not conscious, since it is a question of two very different levels; but for the observer, it is always the same concern to be integrated in a global world regulated by dharma. One might say—in terms one has never heard employed by those concerned—that the buffalo sacrifice is the essential manifestation of the *sva-dharma* of the local collectivity as such. Mutatis mutandis, the same formula would be applicable to the royal buffalo sacrifice over which the king presides, surrounded by his vassals and all his subjects, from the highest to the lowest rung—thus with even Brahmans present, whereas at the village level they generally refrain from attending (while eventually contributing to the purchase of the victim). All this transpires as if each village, each capital of the realm, were for its population the center of the world, one whose internal good order would have an essential relation with the rest of the world, even if it should be necessary for it to wage war, to destroy its enemies, the eternal abettors of disorder. This implicitly signifies that internal disorder could come only from without. It is thus the notion of a global order that dominates, and the buffalo sacrifice is a crucial element in the upholding of dharma. Is this surprising when one knows that the Goddess fights the buffalo demon to accomplish the "work of the gods," which coincides with the "welfare of the world"? The influence of bhakti is perceived here, and one can go so far as to say that the buffalo sacrifice, which transcends barriers of caste and daily altercation, is the form that locally absorbs the impact of renunciation on Hindu society (even if one is far removed from the noble disinterestedness advocated by the *Bhagavadgītā*).

The second inversion does not appear to be immediately commensurate with the first. It is the question of substituting a particular goddess, the local representation of the Goddess, for a multiplicity of Vedic gods (and a few goddesses) invoked during the yajña. The transition this time is from the multiple to the one, for even in the case of several grāmadevatās, the ritual is addressed specifically to one of them, or to all of them together as forming a unity. One will recall that they are seven sisters and that the one addressed is always considered to be the eldest and as thus superior to the others. Likewise, the śaktis whom one seeks to avert by means of a preliminary worship have far less power at the center where the grāmadevatā reigns, and it is she alone from whom blessings are awaited. On the other hand, rather than being a sister of Viṣṇu and subordinate to him as in the classical myth, she has as bodyguard, and no doubt as the executor of inferior works (he is the direct witness of the buffalo sacrifice) her younger brother Pōtu Rāju. There is no doubt about her warrior nature, as her full title would be *grāma-rakṣaka-devatā*, "divinity-who-protects-the-village." She is the exact analogue of the goddess celebrated by kings at the time of Vijayādaśamī, and the cultic replica of the Goddess of the DM.

One cannot attempt to account for the inversion of the sex of the deity addressed by the sacrifice, which is accompanied by the transformation to a warrior divinity, without first considering a third major inversion that concerns the victim. It is all the more characteristic that the buffalo is offered in sacrifice exclusively to the Goddess and never to a god, although the Goddess may receive the same victims as the gods.[47] The paśu—whose Vedic meanings include both "domesticated animal" and "sacrificial victim"—is as a general rule a domesticated animal, the goat, which has the misfortune to have the Sanskrit name *aja*, "the unborn," providing good material for mythico-mystical speculation. The buffalo, at least as far as the myth is concerned, is not a paśu, and it is for this reason that it can be king of the asuras, from an outer kingdom inferior to the world of man. As has already been suggested (above, p. 63, n. 14), the buffalo of the epic is listed only among forest animals, eventually in connection with the hunt,[48] while the female buffalo is evidently included among cattle (MBh 12.141.22 [139.22]; one finds the same division in the *Amarakośa*). The rakṣas Baka demands as his yearly tribute, from which to make a meal, two buffalo and one man from the people over whom he reigns (1.160.6-7 [148.6-7]). In one of the versions of the Skanda myth (13.86.22 [86.21]), the rākṣasas give Skanda a boar and buffalo as a gift. These two animals, which were perhaps in the past ritually associated—one with the springtime Durgāpūjā and the hunt, the other with the autumnal Durgāpūjā (above, p. 63, n. 14)—have some comparable traits. In particular, both are fond of water: the theme of the boar pleasurably playing in water is found from the Brāhmaṇas to the Purāṇas. The buffalo wallows for hours in miry swamp water, motionless under the sun. Arjuna kills an asuric boar (MBh 3.39.7-16 [40.7-16]) in his famous combat with Rudra disguised as a hunter, just as Skanda kills Mahiṣa (3.231.95-96 [221.65-66]). Ecologically, the buffalo is found to be the exact opposite of the antelope: the latter, because of the dry zone which its natural habitat circumscribes, is the sign of land that is good for men, propitious for sacrifice. The buffalo, associated with paludal lands, represents, on the contrary, all that remains outside the sacrificial system.[49] At the same time, the presence of water, sought by cobras and elephants, evokes a lushness of vegetation, a promise of fecundity, which Hindu conceptions relate to a subterranean world (with which it is important to establish good relations) that is immediately subjacent to terra firma. This does not appear to have been foreseen by the Vedic sacrifice, at which, however, one does see to it that the yūpa is abundantly watered (above, p. 38). But it is also in the MBh that

[47]Is there a historical evolution in this practice? All one knows is that it is the MBh—once again—that contains a Skanda myth which has him battling with the demon Mahiṣa (3.223 ff. [213 ff.], partially taken up again in 9.44-46 [43-45]). Is it by chance that in this version of his myth, Skanda marries Devasenā and that this "Army-of-the-gods" is explicitly given as his *mahiṣī*, his primary wife? In addition, in this version as in 13.84 ff. (83 ff.), in which Tāraka is the asura, he slays the demon with his *śakti*, the spear that characterizes him, but which presents a thorny iconographical problem since it is frequently eliminated in favor of the *vajra*, or represented as a second form of the *vajra*, the weapon of Indra (cf. L'Hernault 1978, 140-59).

[48]Cf. among others MBh 1.40.10-12, 74.5b-6, 228.1-2, 3.64.1-2, 11.11, 64.129, 240.10, etc. (1.36.9-10, 68.5-6, 219.1-2, 3.61.1-2 (*varāha* instead of *mahisa*), 12.11, 61.123, 229.10, etc.).

[49]The buffalo is the mount of Yama, the god of death, but also of Vārāhī, who, as one of the Saptamātṛkās, corresponds to Varāha, the Boar.

Arjuna marries a nāga princess who has the complicity of her maternal nāga ancestors,[50] and Bhīma marries a rākṣasī. And this is without mentioning the numerous asuric women of Kṛṣṇa himself. If the pure and impure remain well separated, each has its place in an indissociable whole: not only does Indra have an elephant as his mount (with an evocative name: Airāvata), but his spouse is of asuric ancestry and his charioteer seeks his son-in-law among the nāgas. While Arjuna is protecting the horse for Yudhiṣṭhira's aśvamedha during its year of ritual wandering, he provokes his son from Maṇipur (another region of little glory from the point of view of dharma) to combat, and when he is beaten and thought to be dead, it is his nāga wife Ulūpī (= the saving "ship") who brings him back to life. Not only does the pure mix with the impure, but the sacrifice is transposed to the battlefield. The nāga son of Arjuna and the rākṣasa son of Bhīma die defending the cause of their fathers, which is that of the gods. These epic conceptions are also inscribed on the map of India, since so many place-names are the names of asuras whom local legend describes as vanquished by the sovereign goddess of the locality.[51]

The double inversion of the deity's sex and of the category of victim is thus inseparable from a third variable: the sacrificial terrain is henceforth assimilated to a battlefield. The buffalo sacrifice reproduces the Goddess's victory over a particularly impure and malevolent demon (note the blackish color of the Indian buffalo). These inversions and the transformation of the very notion of sacrifice—which necessarily proceed through the epic—entail inversions of details that we have been able to note in passing. The putting to death by strangulation or suffocation (which is perhaps still the oldest manner of representing Mahiṣamardinī in north India) makes way for a distinctly bloody sacrifice in which the blood becomes an essential part of the offering to the deity—consider what this can signify in a context where Brahmans and their pure gods privilege nonviolence. The right leg of the animal recalls the fettering of the left leg of the Vedic victim.

Here a question arises anew and with greater force than before: does the Goddess not simply stand in for the avatāra who also kills an asura precisely where a temple is raised for him?[52] The whole difference arises from the fact that despite his role as a warrior, the god is never worshipped as such in his temple. If the asura is present before him or at his side, transformed into a devotee, guardian, or minister, no animal victim repre-

[50]The nāga princess, like the nāgas encountered by Bhīma at the bottom of the waters, is of course in no way connected with the Nāga tribes of Assam, even if the latter owe their generic name to their particularly humid habitat. The nāgas of the epic are "cobras" of the subterranian aquatic world, where they live as purely mythical beings.

[51]On this point too, the HV provides a transition on the plane of myth, and one would like to know its counterpart in contemporary practice. At 2.89.58a (App. no. 29 D 1.392), it is said that the princes assembled for a convivial festival around Balarāma ate roasted buffalo basted with melted butter, and one does not know whether it is a domestic or a game animal. Already in 2.17.14-15 (60.12-13), on the occasion of the famous "sacrifice to the mountain" which Krsna commands the cowherds to perform, one eats paśus such as buffalo. But, is paśu here opposed to *mrga*?

[52]The myth of Kolhāsura, killed by the goddess Ambābaī or Mahālakṣmī at Kolhapur (Mahārāṣtra), is altogether comparable to that of Hiranyakaśipu and Narasimha, and would prompt a positive response. Let us note that Mahālakṣmī here, like Narasimha, is vegetarian.

senting this demon is offered to the god. One will even go so far as to relieve the god of killing the asura, giving this responsibility to the goddess (spouse, sister, or mother, etc.). If an animal victim appears at the side of the temple, it is destined for the asura, or a spouse of the god who is inferior in status, or to all the gods. In other words, the appearance of the warrior Goddess in the myth, and of the buffalo sacrifice in the goddess's temple, would be equivalent to the emergence of a supplementary level of the Hindu pantheon. The roles are not interchangeable. The Goddess appears so that the avatāra god, who sets the example by paying court to the earthly prince, can nonetheless remain the supreme Yogin in the temple, or at least the pure god whom the Brahmans can serve there without defiling themselves. Moreover, the goddess also serves as an intermediary between the superior gods and the inferior gods or demons (for the latter are evidently the gods of the low castes). But these roles are also not stable, and one could say that these structural exigencies engender a narrative: the royal goddess, served by Brahmans, has a tendency, like the Brahmans themselves, to convert to vegetarianism. Does not Parvatī have to assume the role of a yoginī, an ascetic, to attract the attention of Śiva whom she wants to marry? And the Goddess of the DM emits Kālī from herself so that Kālī can make the impure collection of the asura's blood. The appearance of the Goddess is thus only the beginning of a process of hierarchization that continued from goddess to god or to inferior goddess, and the castes were able to recognize their own in this infinitely diversified pantheon.

Nonetheless, the buffalo sacrifice retains its originality. Even if the annual festival of a great temple (especially the chariot procession) is a matter for the local community, and even if it reenacts the mythic combat of the god with the asura during the festival, no other sacrifice celebrates the victory of a god over an asura in the same manner as the buffalo sacrifice. It is thus probable that the subordination of the Goddess to the cause of the gods, which is to be explained by the fact that she symbolizes creation in opposition to the god who withdraws into himself, does not exhaust the meaning of this sacrifice. It is also probable that the buffalo of the myth is an asura of a particular type, who cannot be compared to just any king of the asuras.[53] Although the DM reduces it to the level of any ordinary asura, the buffalo seems to menace more than the cosmic order. Its ancient link with Yama is certainly not without reason: Yama is Dharmarāja, and his mount, if it is asuric, recalls that death is part of the play of the dharma on earth.

Another original feature of this mythico-ritual complex of the Goddess and her buffalo, which cannot be reduced to a mere hand-me-down of the avatāra myth, is the relation that seems to usually exist between the Goddess and her demon, either at the level of myth, or in worship, or both—which takes us back to Pōtu Rāju, younger brother of the goddess before whom he stands guard. In spite of the fact that the buffalo appears to represent the greatest degree of impurity—and is, in fact, eaten as food by the lowest castes—it has kinship ties with the Goddess. This is perhaps not so surprising

[53]One may compare Mahisa in particular with Tāraka, but also Andhaka: in brief, with asuras who maintain a relationship with Śiva or with his son Subrahmanya rather than with an avatāra of Visnu. Andhaka is also the name of one of the "tribes" (or "peoples") around Krsna and Dvārakā in the MBh, together with the Vrsnis and Bhojas.

when one recalls that to subsist, the Earth and her societies cannot evade the impure aspects of life, beginning with the impurity of death. But it is also in the purest tradition of Vedic sacrifice that the victim and the sacrificer are linked, that the victim would have something about it that would make it a plausible substitute; and in the sacrifice of battle, the Goddess makes her enemy the victim, which is the very definition of victory. This relationship may be translated in the cult by a maximal convergence of representations. Whitehead (1921, 65) notes that during a cholera epidemic (in the Godāvarī delta), one installs the goddess Maridiamma, fashioned of a neem trunk with the top roughly hewn to form a head, upon which animals are impaled (no doubt piglets). From the Pōtu Rāju made of śamī to the neem post representing the goddess charged with "calming" the disease, the distance is not so great, especially if one recalls that the neem is a likely substitute for śamī.[54] At the lower level of the hierarchy the idea comes to light that the goddess herself can fulfill the function vested in Pōtu Rāju.

Not forgotten is that in the most complex structure—or simply the most complete and thus most meaningful, which is the hypothesis I am proposing—Pōtu Rāju is found at the center of the village, beneath a pipal or a pipal-neem couple, on watch at the settlement's boundary. Where this is the case, the buffalo sacrifice is performed in front of the central Pōtu Rāju and in the presence of a temporary image of the goddess, which is to disappear at the same time as the victim. It has already been said (above, p. 86) that the association of the śamī post with the pipal would evoke the Vedic sacrificial fire in its most beneficial form, at least to the same extent as the yūpa. It remains in place, like the Vedic yūpa (and is surely doomed to gradually decay and disappear), while the deity and victim are cast out, expelled, in a ceremony very similar to the *visarjana,* the ritual dismissal of the deities at the conclusion of a ceremony. The post at the boundary presents a more complicated case. It has a double presence at the boundary because the temple itself is located at the edge of the village, and because Pōtu Rāju stands at the entrance to the temple marking, like the yūpa, the passage from within (the village, the temple) to without. It remains that Pōtu Rāju is made of śamī, but he is devoid of any association with the pipal. He is adorned with neem leaves, which only reinforce his "śamī function." The sacrificial fire is removed from the altar and carried to the boundary, but in its "calm" form, asleep and sleep-inducing, appeased and appeasing. One will recall that the buffalo sacrifice, while becoming more rare, is above all associated with calamity, essentially with epidemics that strike man and beast. The temple and its guardian post are thus called upon to avert this disorder of disorders, the fire within the fever, vector of death. If one recognizes that sickness—whose links with the goddess are known[55]—is the principal local form of sociocosmic disorder, of adharma, the śamī

[54]One knows that the cult images at the Jagannātha temple in Purī are made of neem wood and must be periodically renewed. Trees required for this are felled in a margosa forest near the Virajā temple in Jājpur, beginning with that of the Sudarśana post. Cf. Eschmann et al. 1978, 231 ff. The ritual connected with the tree destined for the post contains more than an echo of Vedic ritual, but the authors of the work seek the origin among the hill tribes of Orissa. One notes in particular the design made on the tree with kuśa grass of a puruṣa, head down and feet in the air, that is to say, inverted in relation to the puruṣa as unit of measure of the Vedic post.

[55]And with neem: neem leaves are placed on a feverish person because of their power to refresh.

post at the boundary assumes its full significance. It is charged to extinguish the fire within the fever that comes from outside, or from the goddess, and that is viewed as a kind of miniature *pralaya,* a world conflagration from which one must preserve the village. It is only just that Pōtu Rāju should receive a few goats while the goddess gets the buffalo.[56]

[56]One will observe the inverse role of the śamī (at the boundary) during the śamīpūjā. See below, pp. 288 ff. Here one is at the royal level, and it is the fire of war that must be made to surge from the śamī toward the enemy. Regarding the goddess of disease as a specialization of the function of the general protectress of the village goddess in Bengal, cf. Nicholas 1981, notably p. 36.

Plate 1. Nunna. Pōtu Rāju before the four goddesses. Pp. 7, 11, 31 (Madeleine Biardeau)

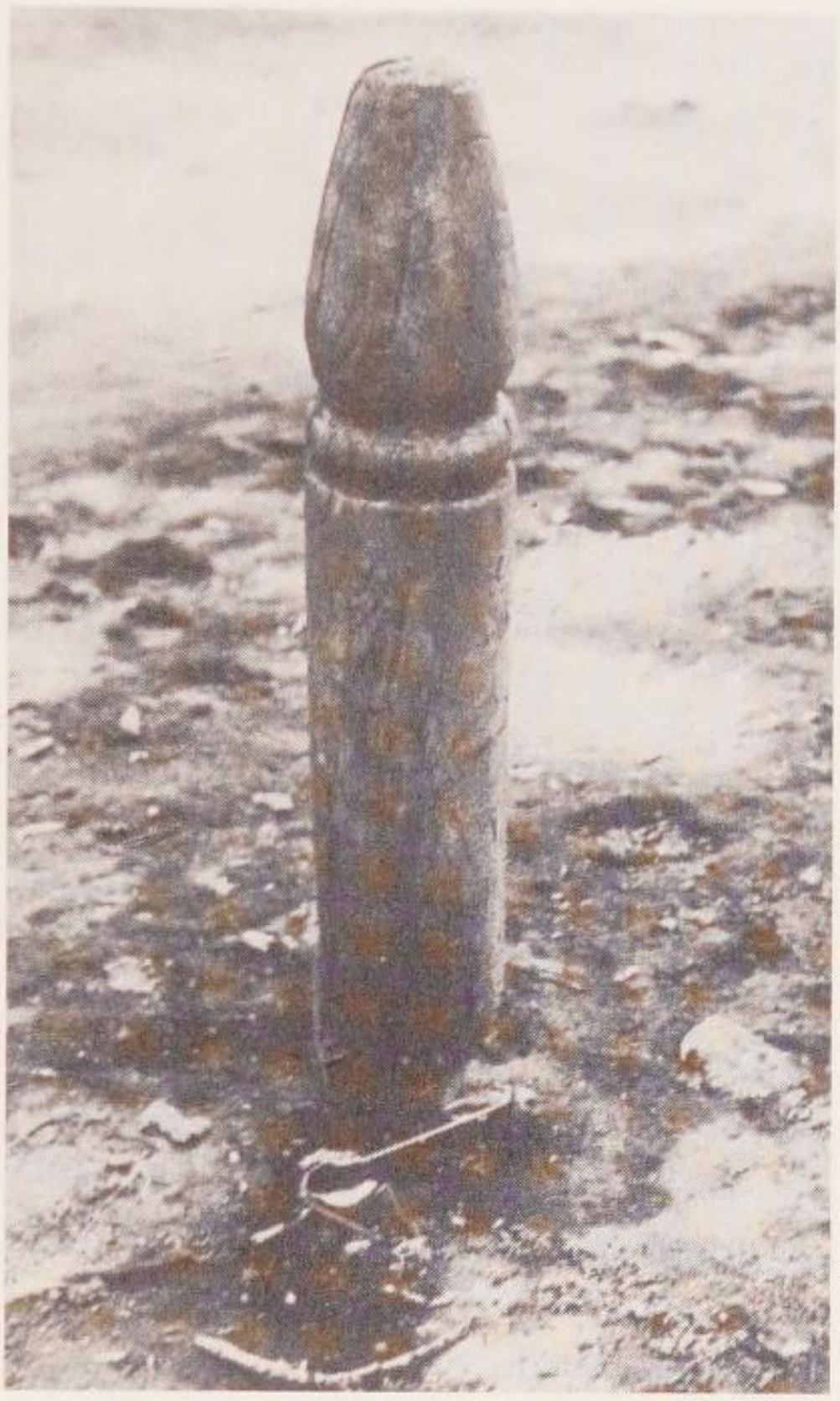

Plate 2. Agiripalli. Pōtu Rāju under the central pipal. Pp. 7, 31 (Madeleine Biardeau)

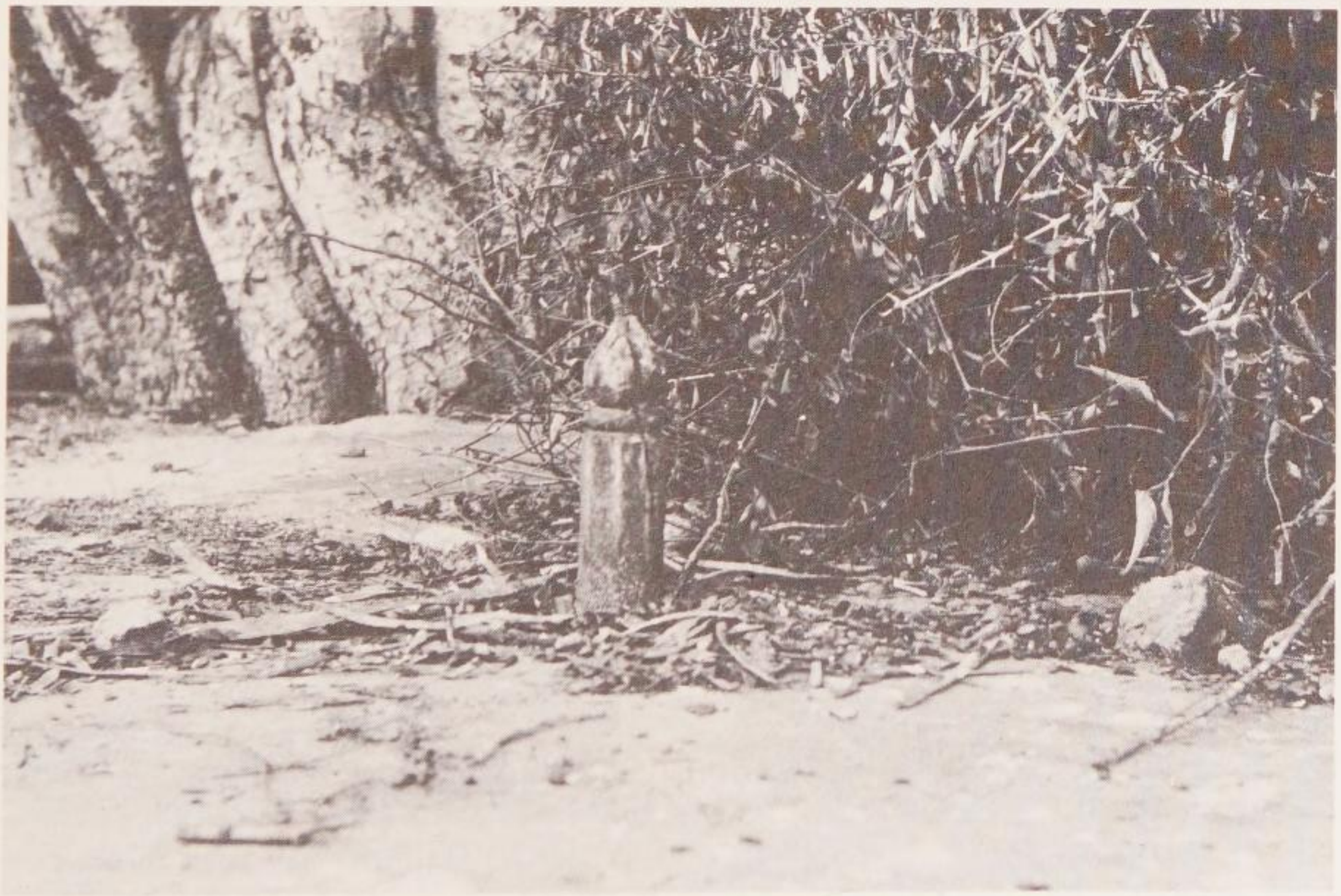

Plate 3. Nunna. Pōtu Rāju before the central pipal. Pp. 7, 11, 31 (Madeleine Biardeau)

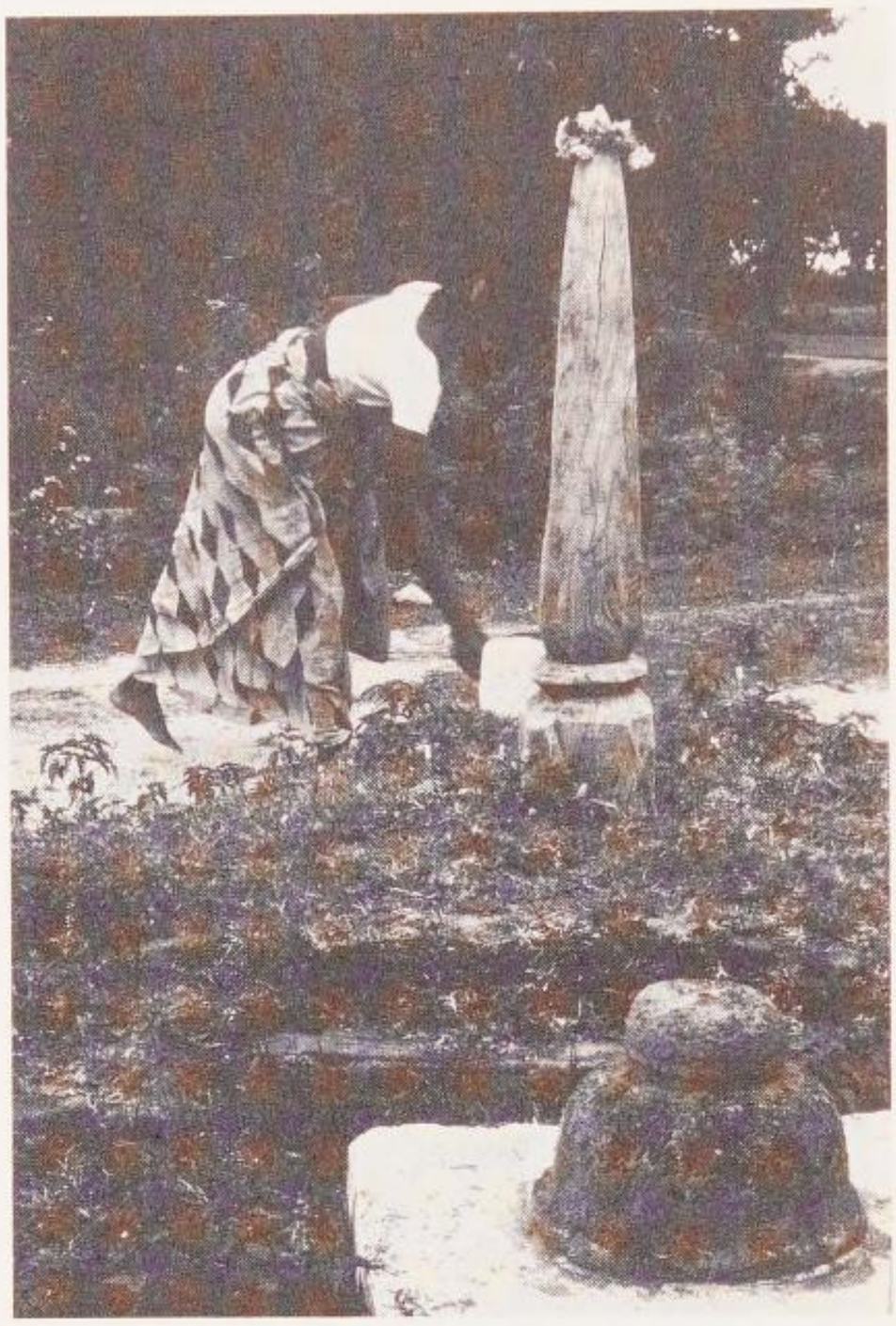

Plate 4. Mallavaram. Pōtu Rāju before the temple of Tukke Gaṅgamma. Pp. 7, 20, 31, 148 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 5. Nunna. Pōtu Rāju of Gaṅganamma. Pp. 7, 158 n. 88 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 6. Chilakalapūḍi. Pōtu Rāju. P. 8 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 7. Makharajola. Pōtu Rāju on horseback and sacrificial post. Pp. 8, 73 n. 30 (Madeleine Biardeau)

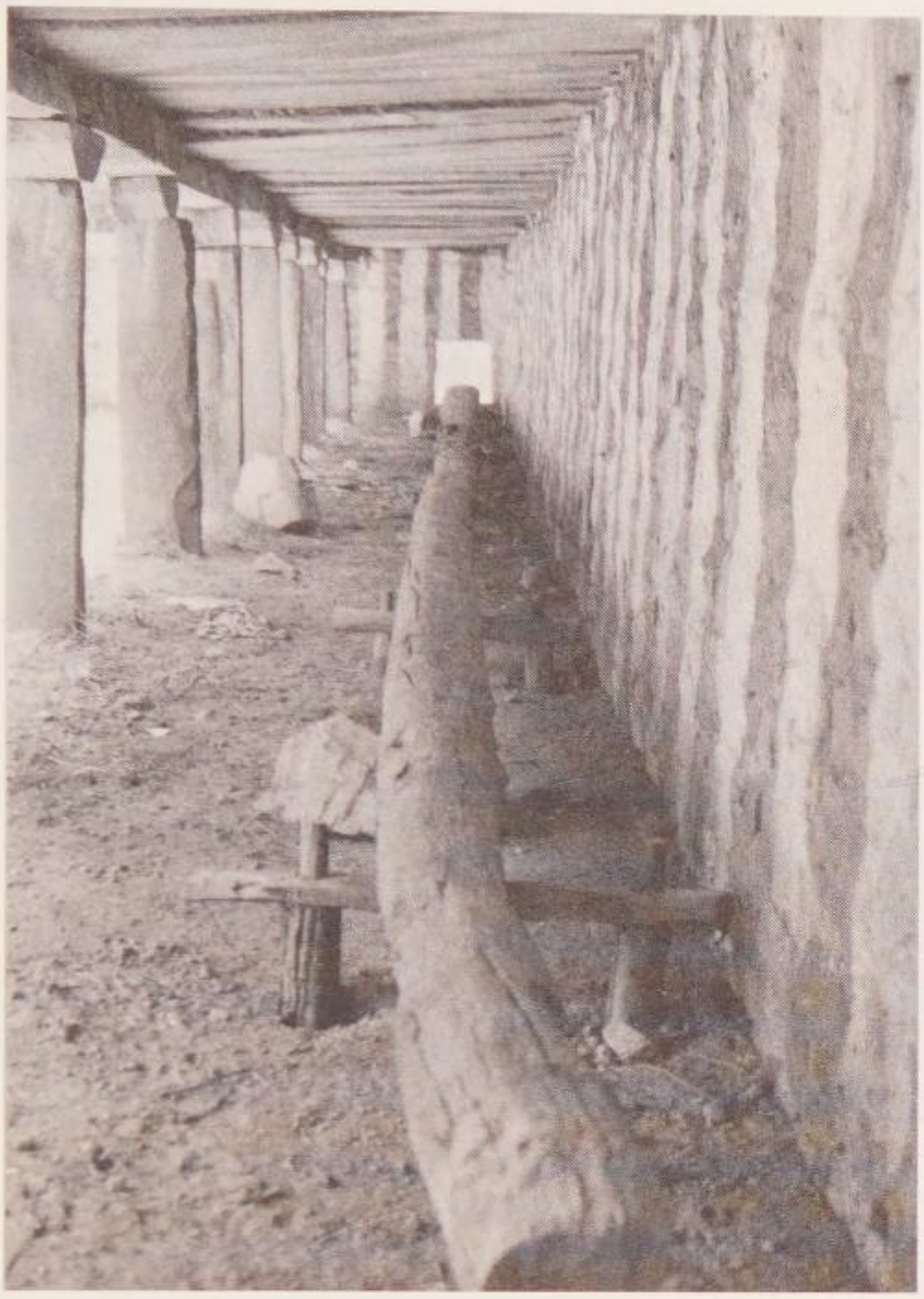

Plate 8. Mannūru. Ceḍil post. P. 18
(Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 9. Nunna. Gaṅganamma.
P. 10 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 10. Nunna. Temple of
the four goddesses. P. 11
(Marie-Louise Reiniche)

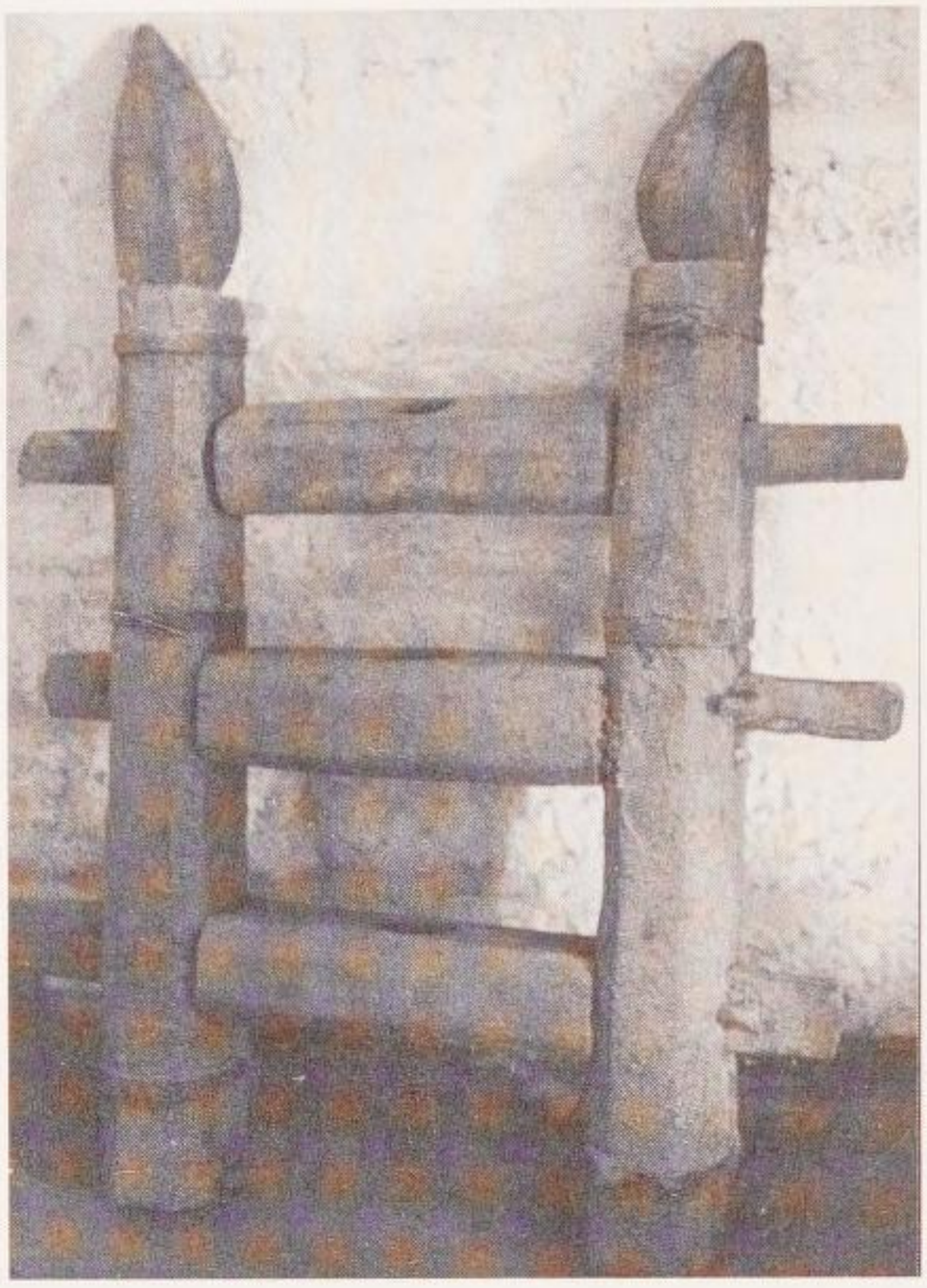

Plate 11. Mannūru. Upper section of ceḍil post. P. 18 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 12. Tukke Gaṅgamma. Interior of sanctuary. P. 20 (Madeleine Biardeau)

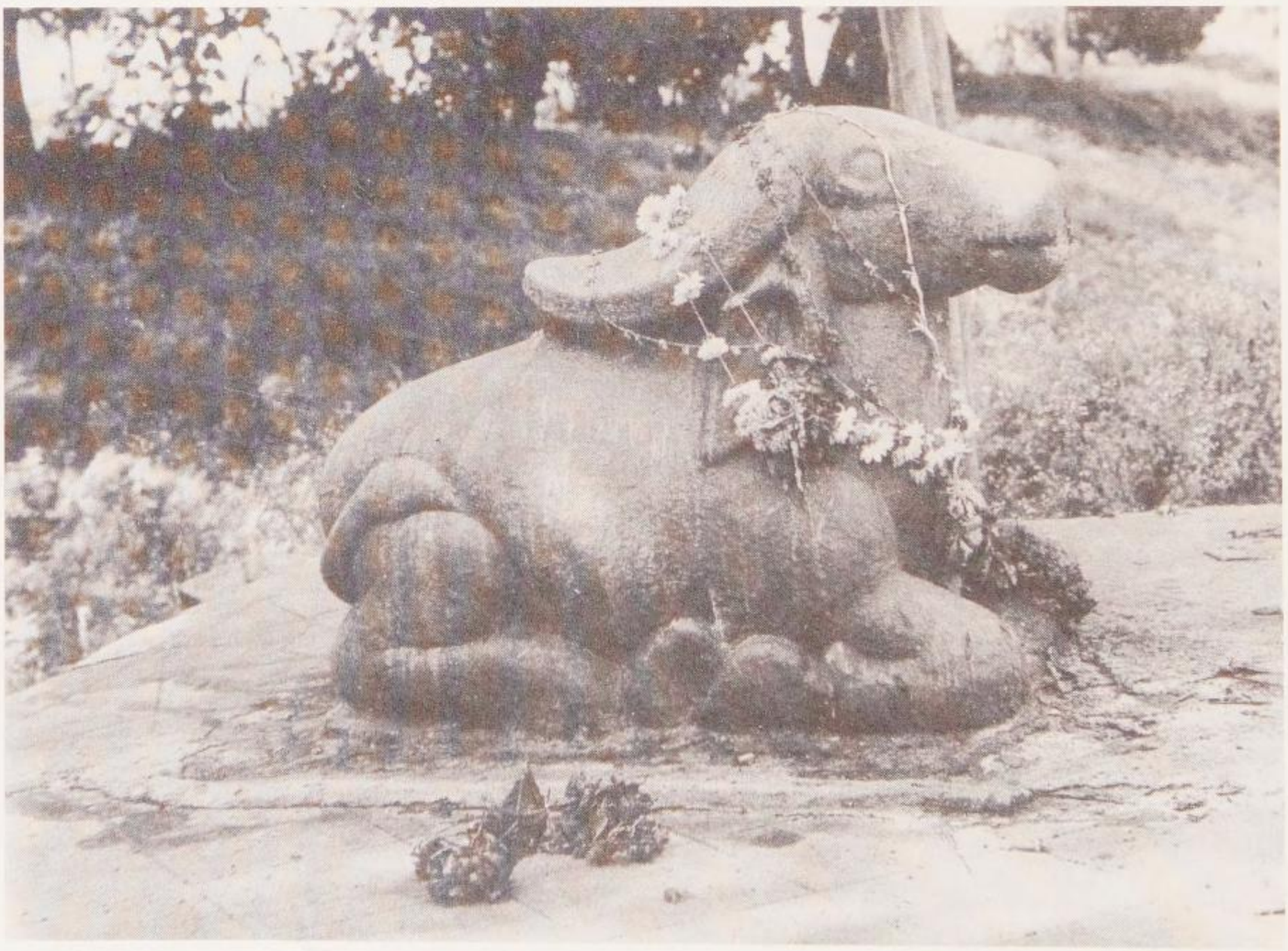

Plate 13. Nasik. Mhasōba. Pp. 26 n. 25, 30 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 14. Ṣolāpur. Pot-rāj on the day of Vijayādaśamī. Pp. 27 n. 27, 193 n. 143, 253 (Madeleine Biardeau)

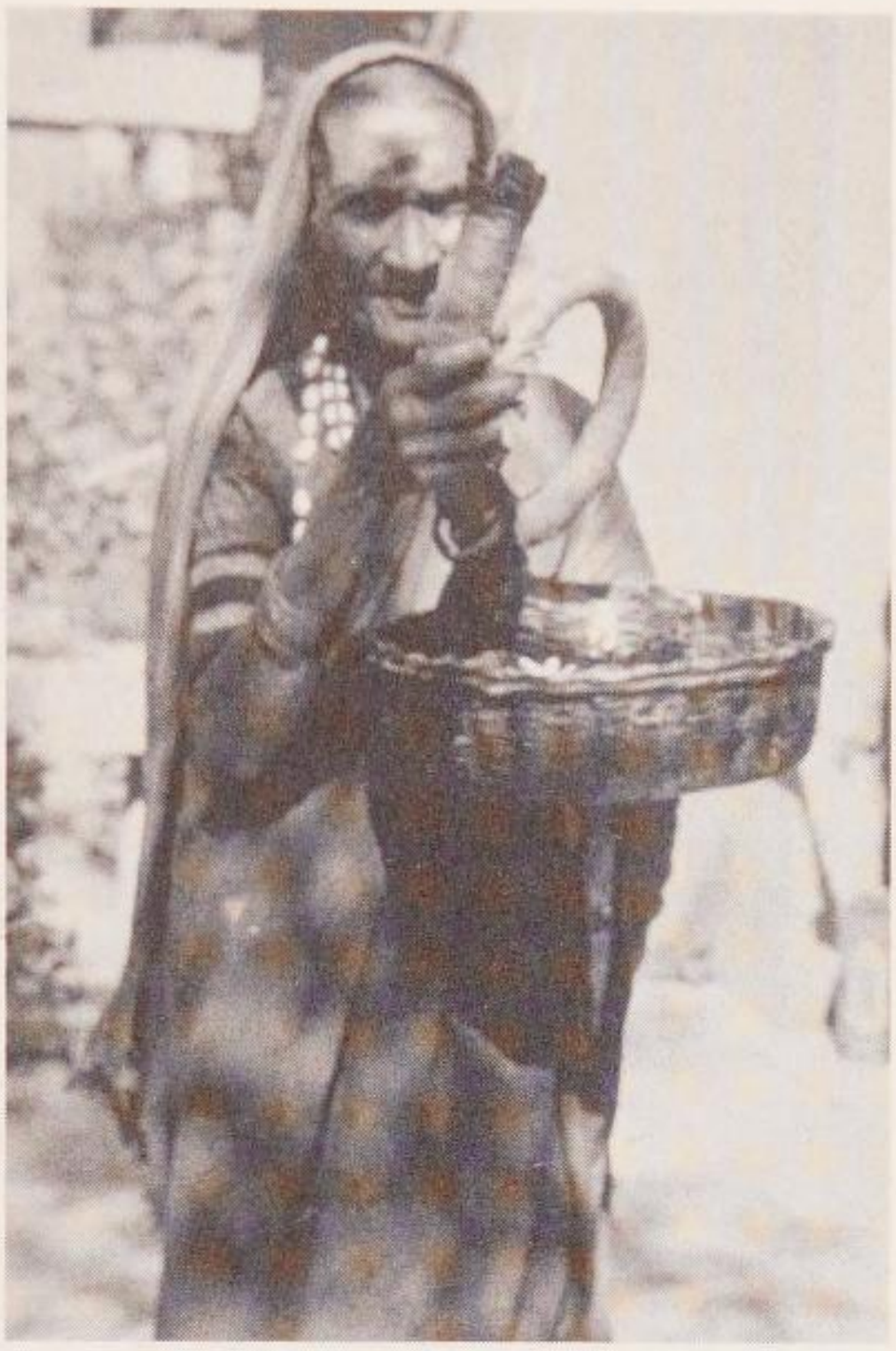

Plate 15. Devotee of Ellamma with lit *pot*. Pp. 27 n. 27, 193 n. 143 (Madeleine Biardeau)

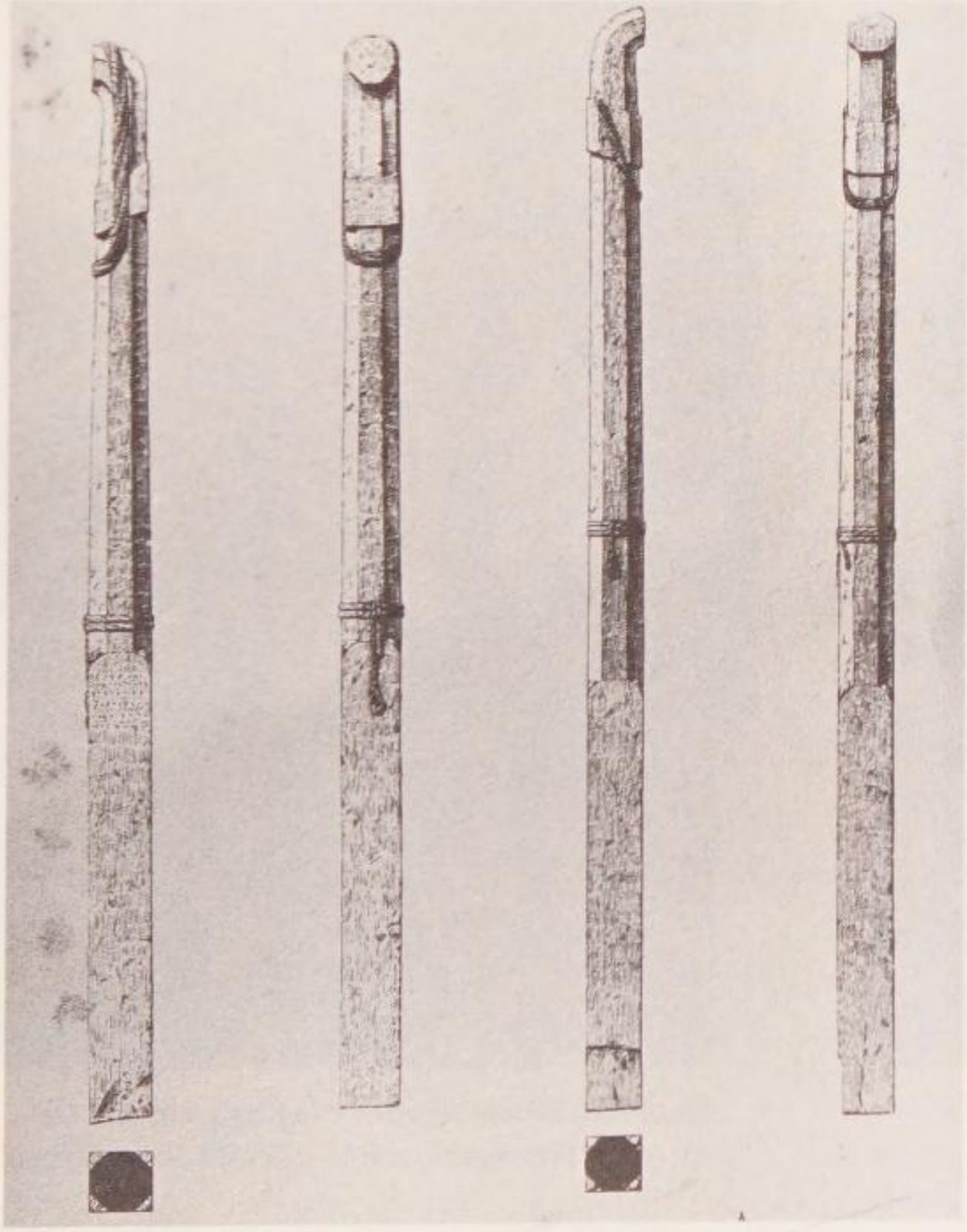

Plate 16. Stone commemorative yūpas (from Vogel 1910-11, p. 23). Pp. 38 n. 10, 60 n. 5, 152 n. 78 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 17. Vākad. Hook-swinging post. P. 31 n. 33 (Guy Poitevin)

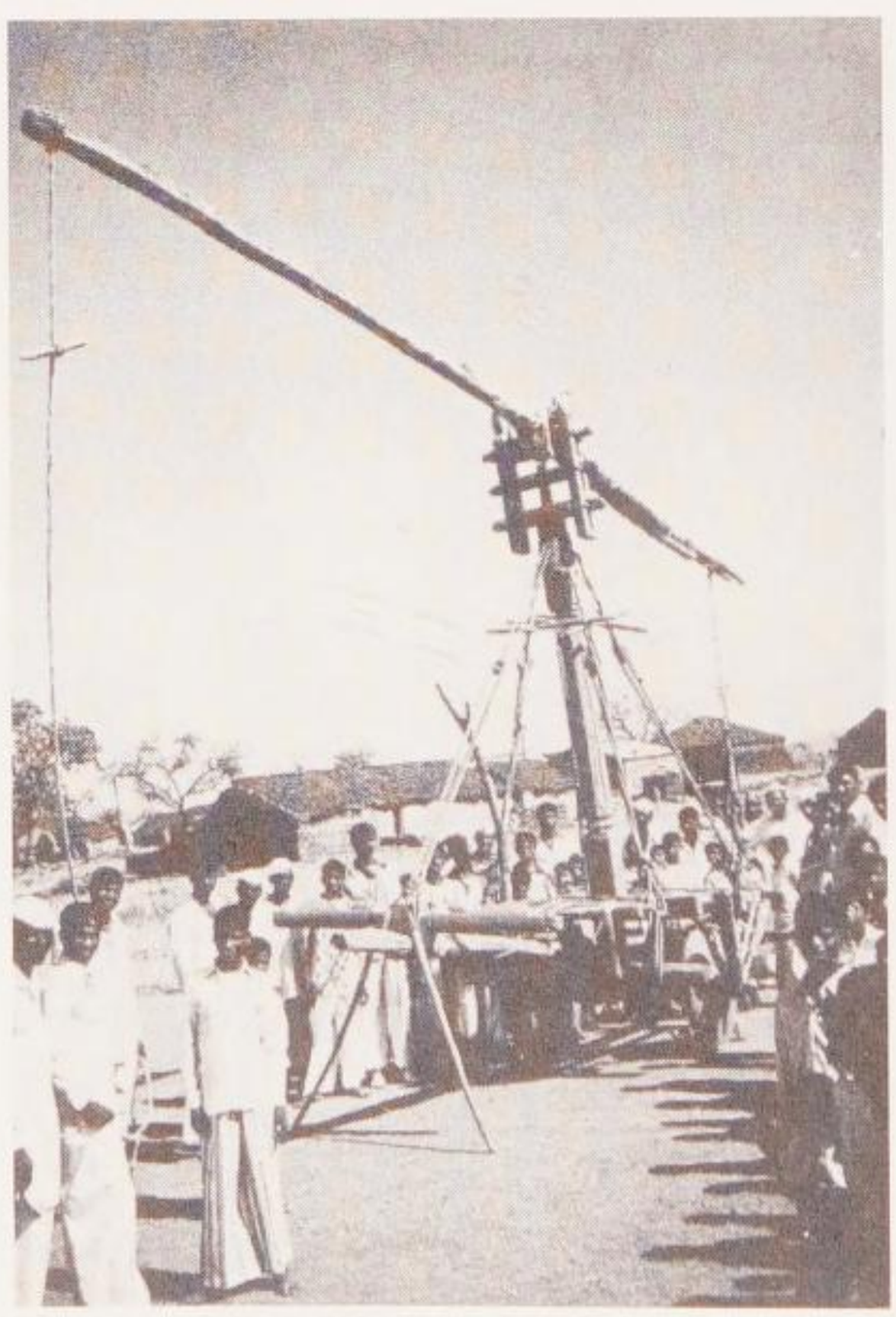

Plate 18. Vākad. Showing the post fixed to a chariot. P. 31 n. 33 (Guy Poitevin)

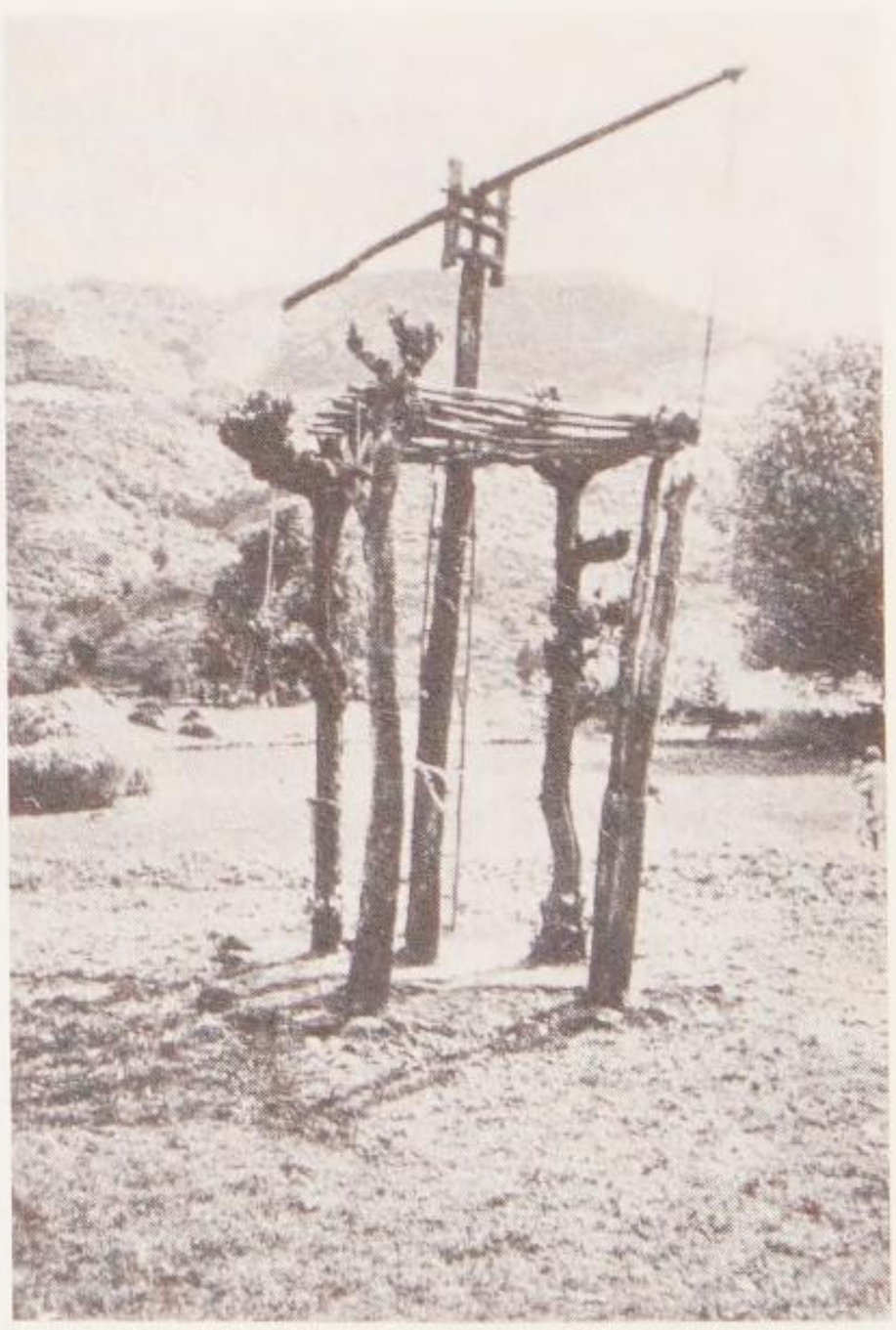

Plate 19. Bhode. Hook-swinging post. P. 31 n. 33 (Guy Poitevin)

Plate 20. Tiruvadigai. Liṅga with cinctured base. P. 38 n. 11 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

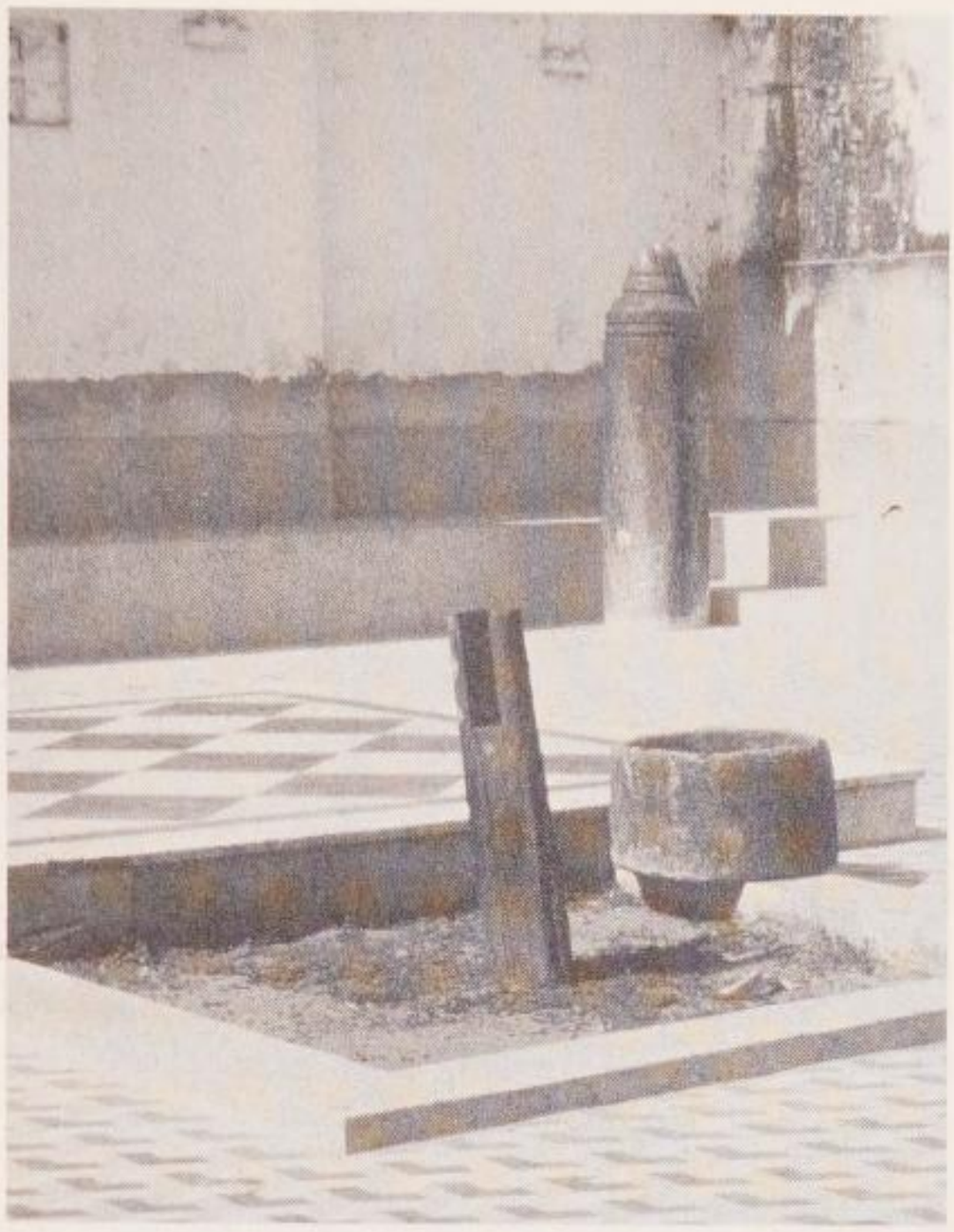

Plate 21. Jājpur. Jūpakāṣṭhā, and in back, śubhastambha. Pp. 59 n. 5, 66 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 22. Simulyapasi. Sanctuary of Kālunī; balikunta. P. 65 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 23. Karuṅkuḷam. Veṅkateśvara (Viṣṇu) image with its ornaments removed. P. 70 n. 24 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 24. Gaondongre. Domestic post of the Marāṭha caste. P. 77 (Françoise L'Hernault)

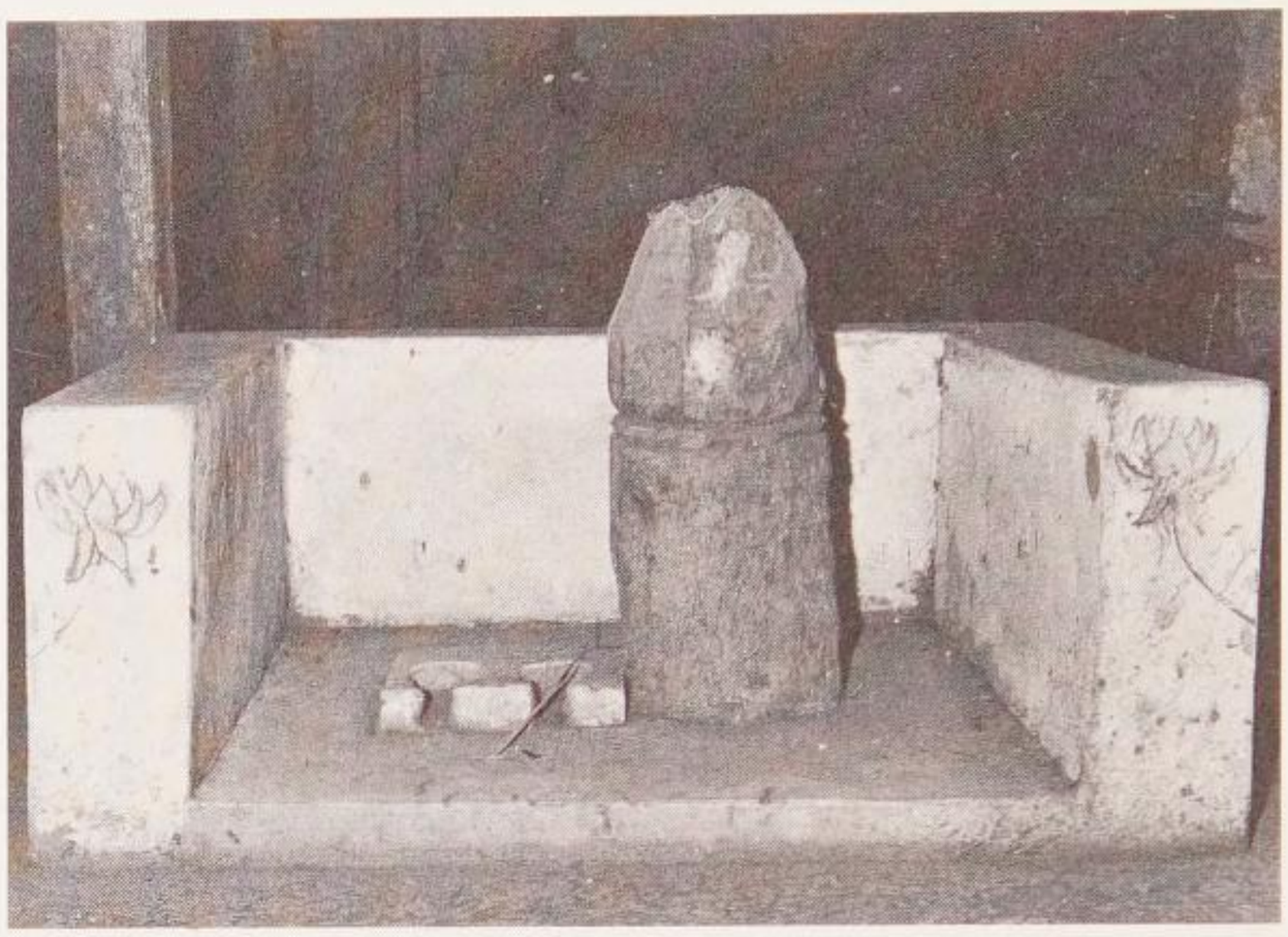

Plate 25. Khalvade. Domestic post of the Amuṅkar caste. P. 77 (Françoise L'Hernault)

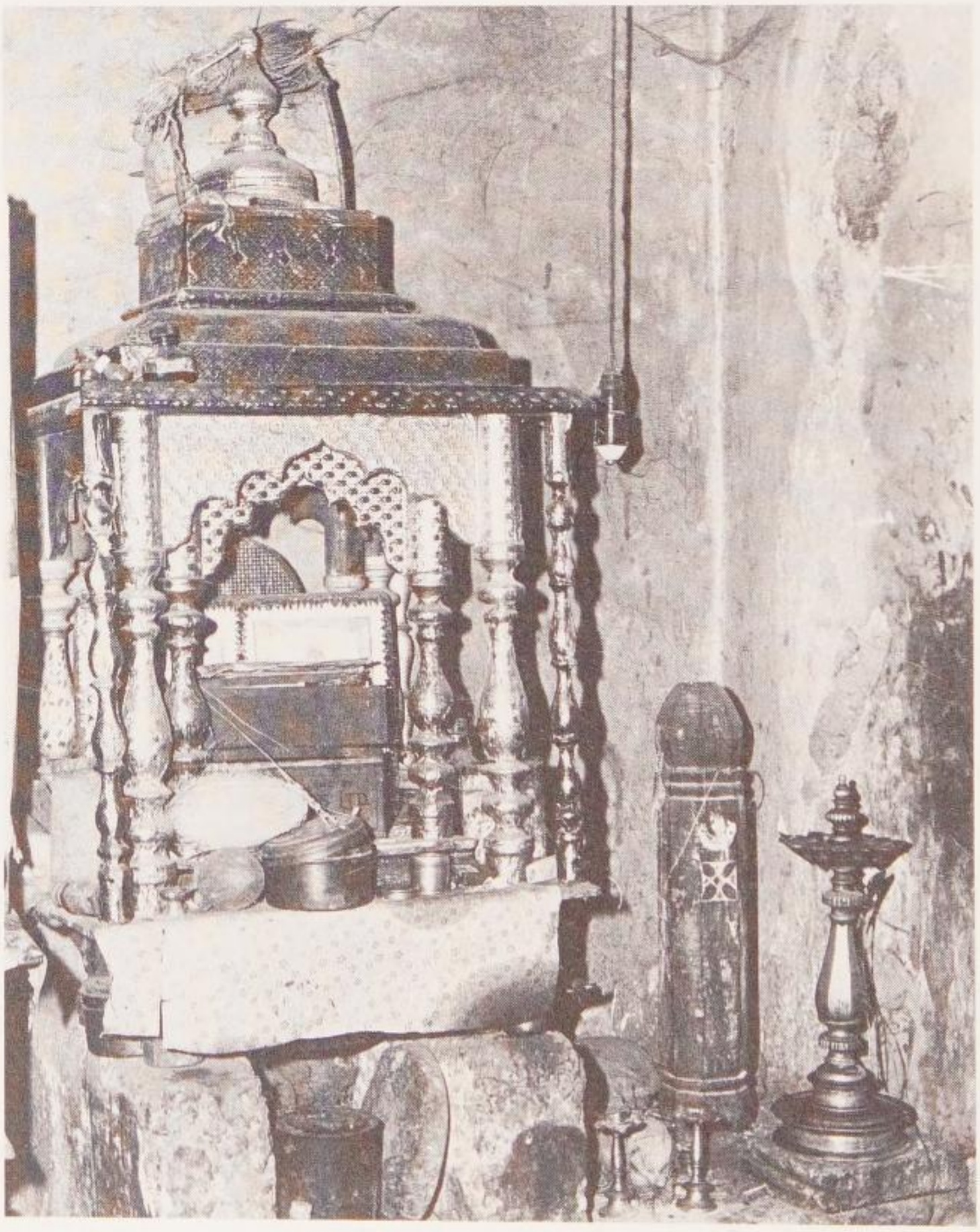

Plate 26. Kanakona. Domestic post of a Sārasvat Brahman. P. 77 (Françoise L'Hernault)

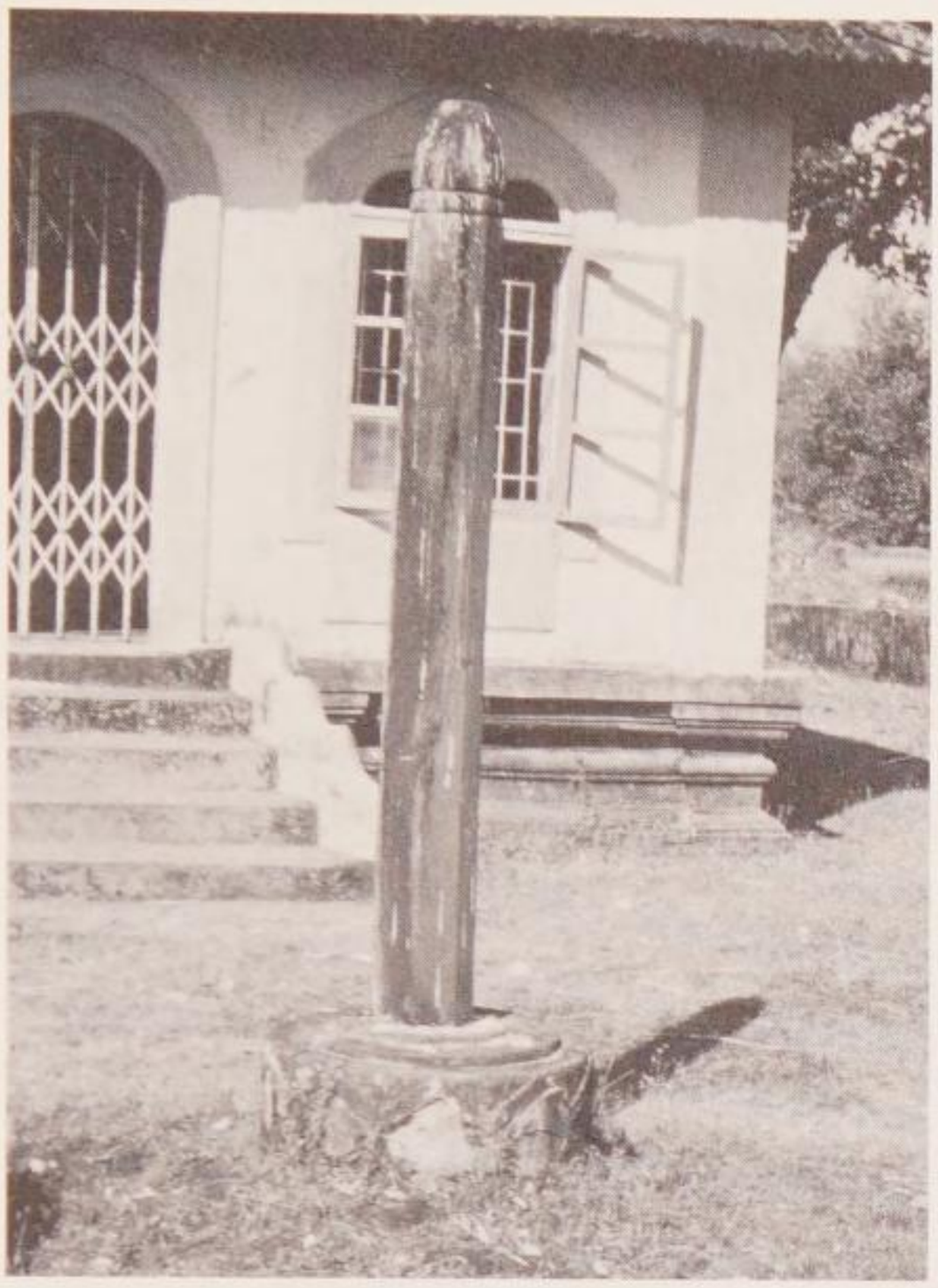

Plate 27. Khalvade. Post of the Nirākāra temple. P. 78 (Madeleine Biardeau)

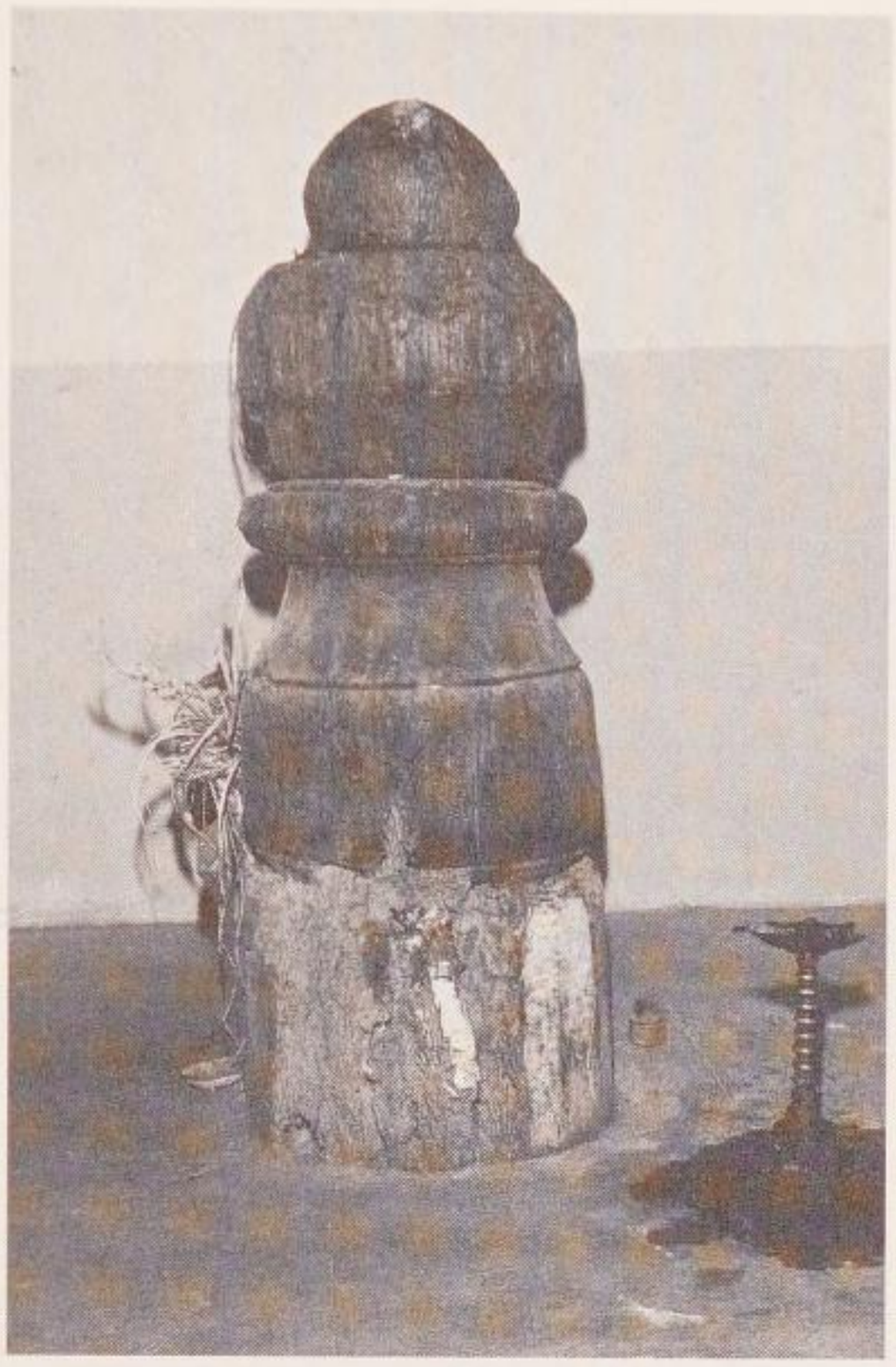

Plate 28. Khalvade. Image worshipped inside the Nirākāra temple. P. 78 n. 9 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 29. Śrīsthol. Post (pillar) in the old sabhā of Mallikārjuna. P. 78 n. 9 (Françoise L'Hernault)

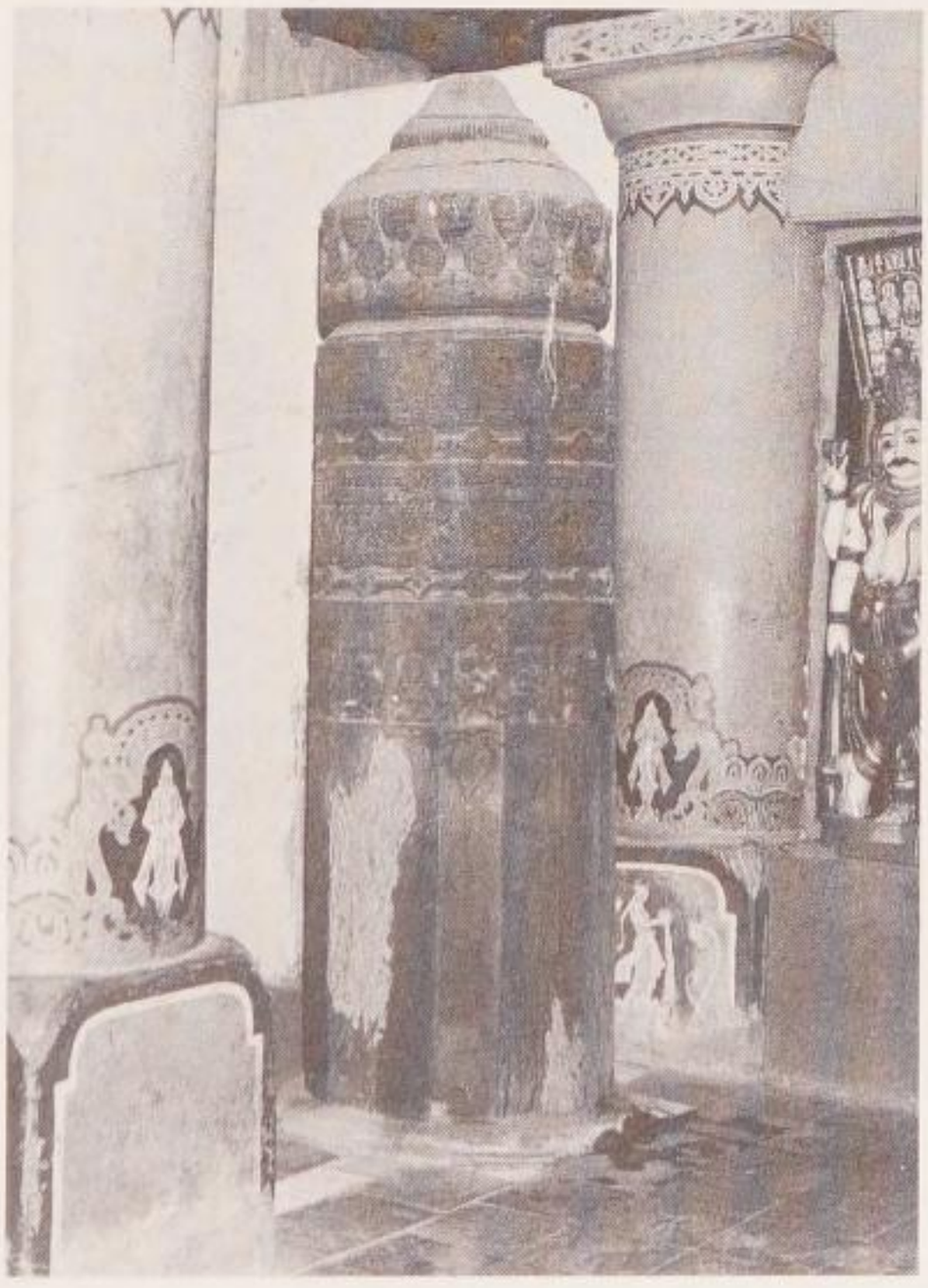

Plate 30. Gaondongre. Oracular post. P. 78 n. 9 (Françoise L'Hernault)

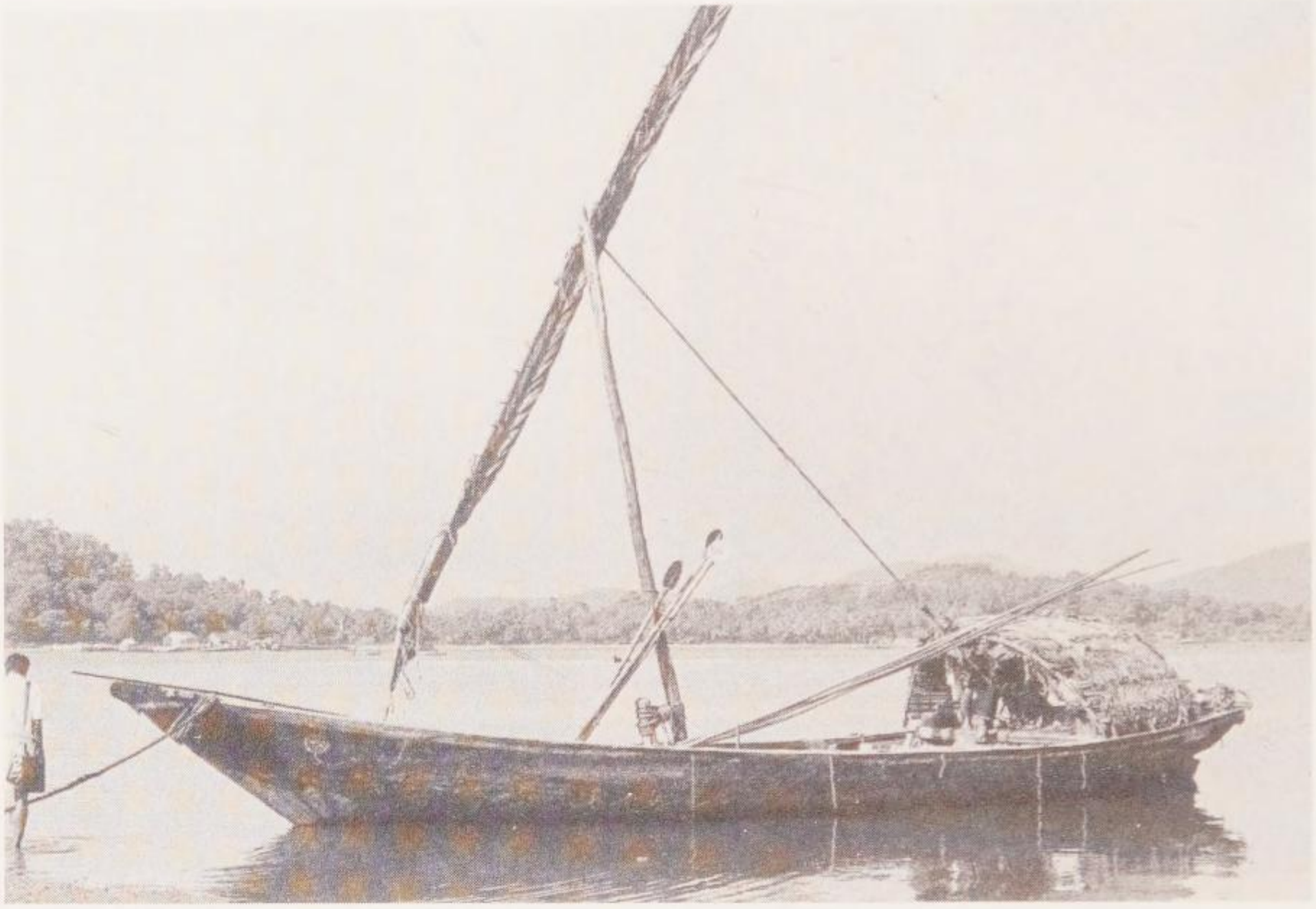

Plate 31. Kharwar. Fishing boat. Note the post tied to the mast. P. 81 (Françoise L'Hernault)

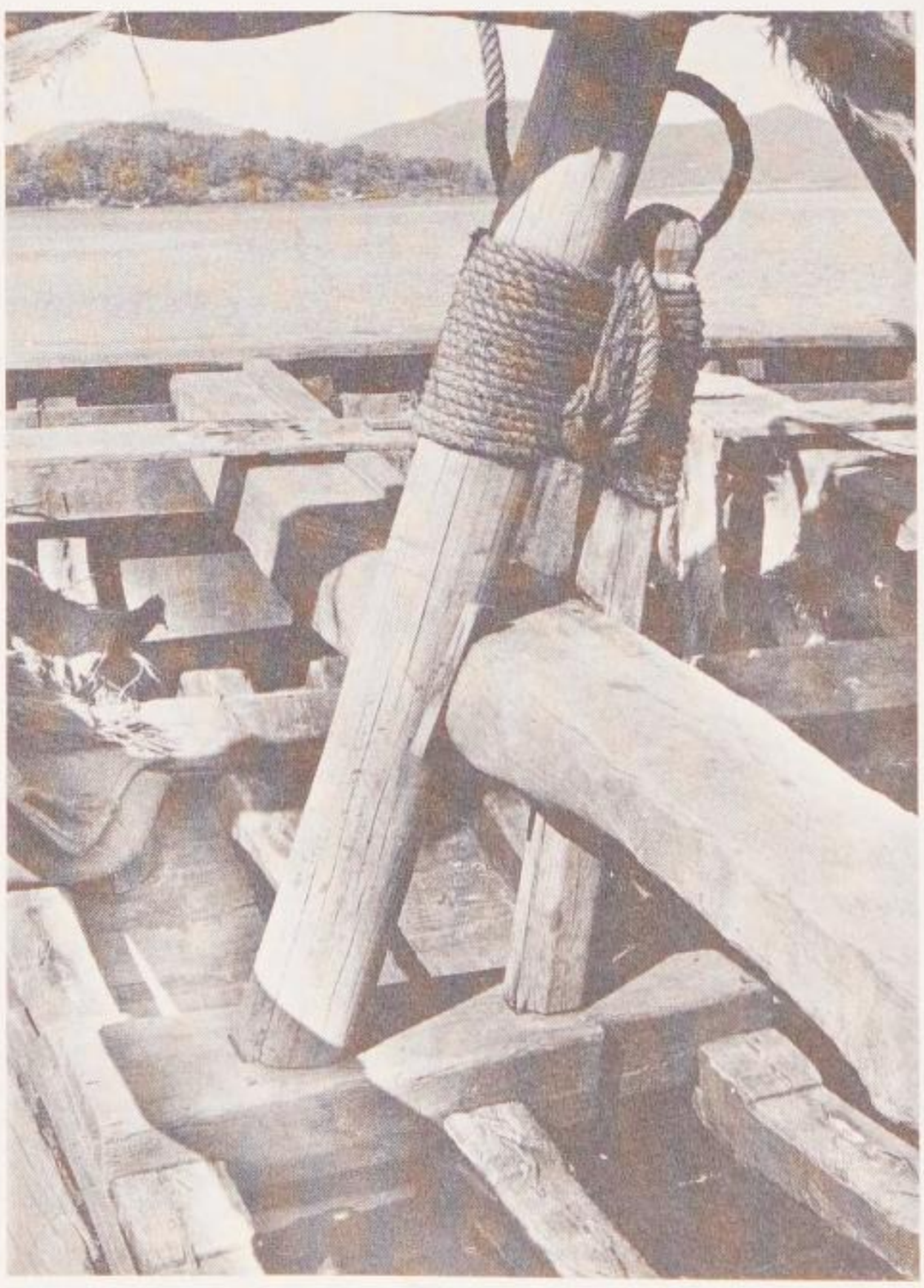

Plate 32. Detail of the mast and the boat's foundation post. P. 81 (Françoise L'Hernault)

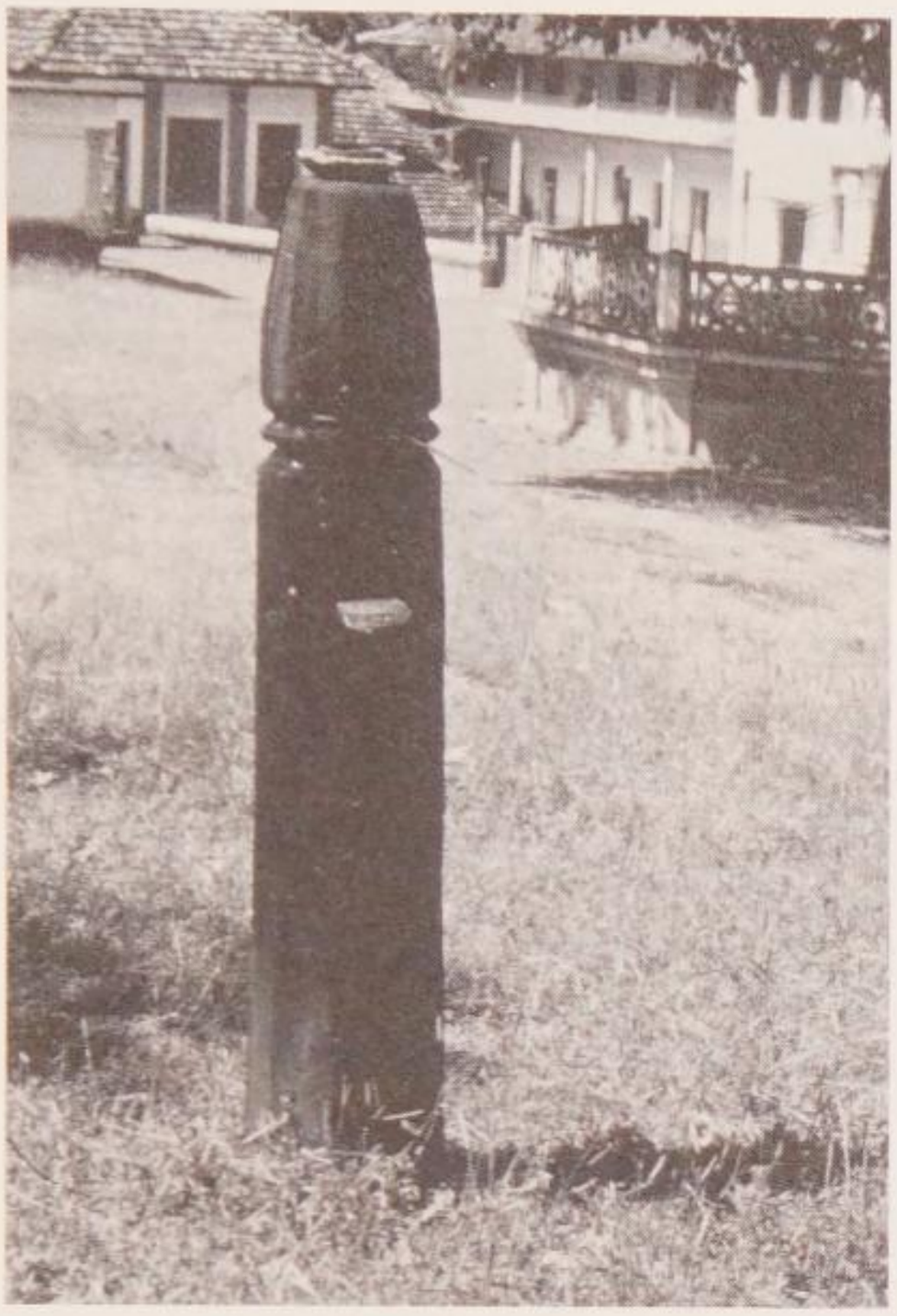

Plate 33. Śrīsthol. Mallikārjuna temple. Memorial of a Marāṭha family. P. 80 (Madeleine Biardeau)

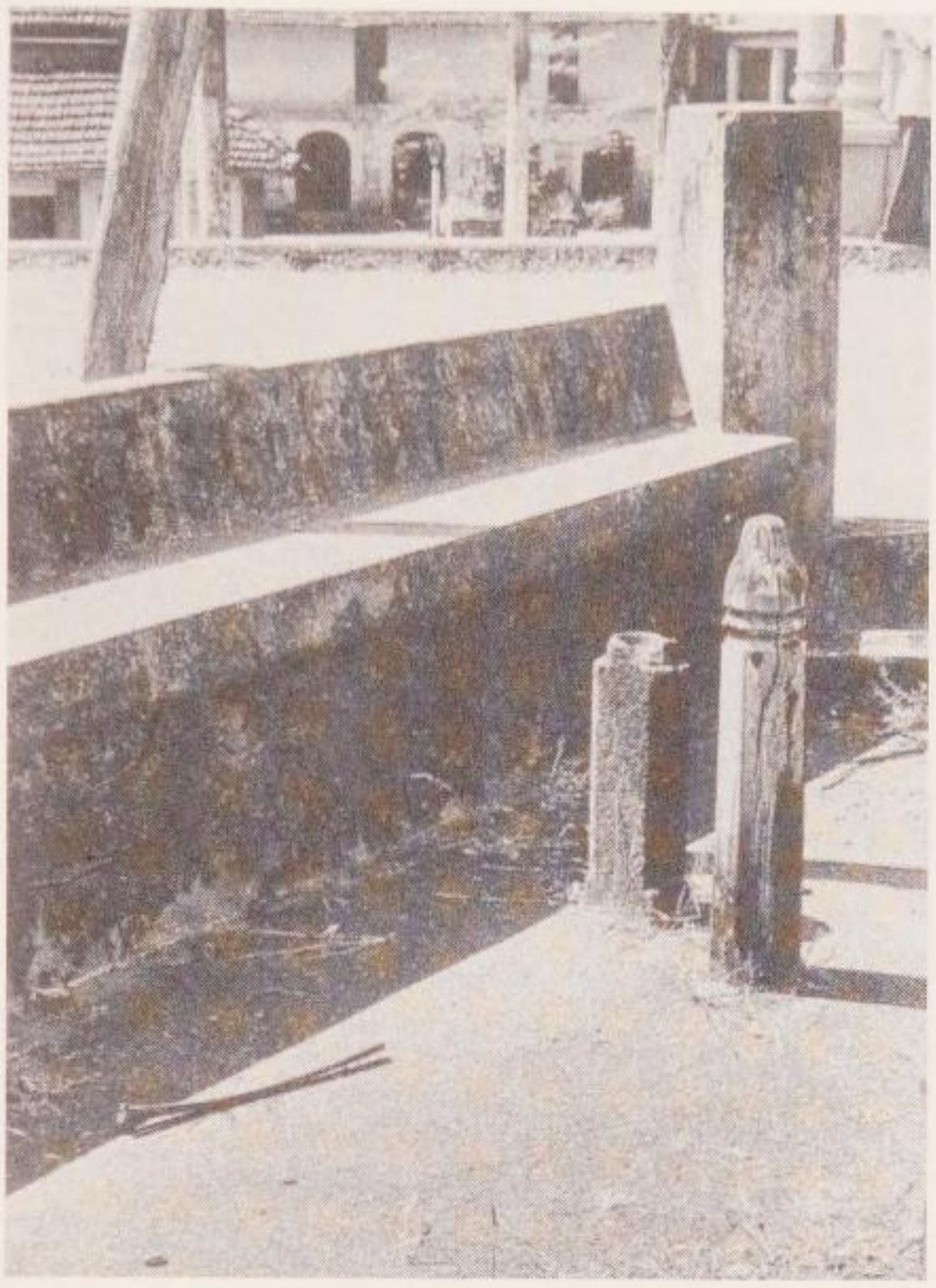

Plate 34. Śrīsthol. Post of the sabhā of the Mallikārjuna temple. P. 80 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 35. Śrīsthol. Mallikārjuna temple. Tribals' memorial. P. 81 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 36. Poona. Caṇḍa at the entrance of the Rāmeśvar temple. P. 84 n. 23 (Madeleine Biardeau)

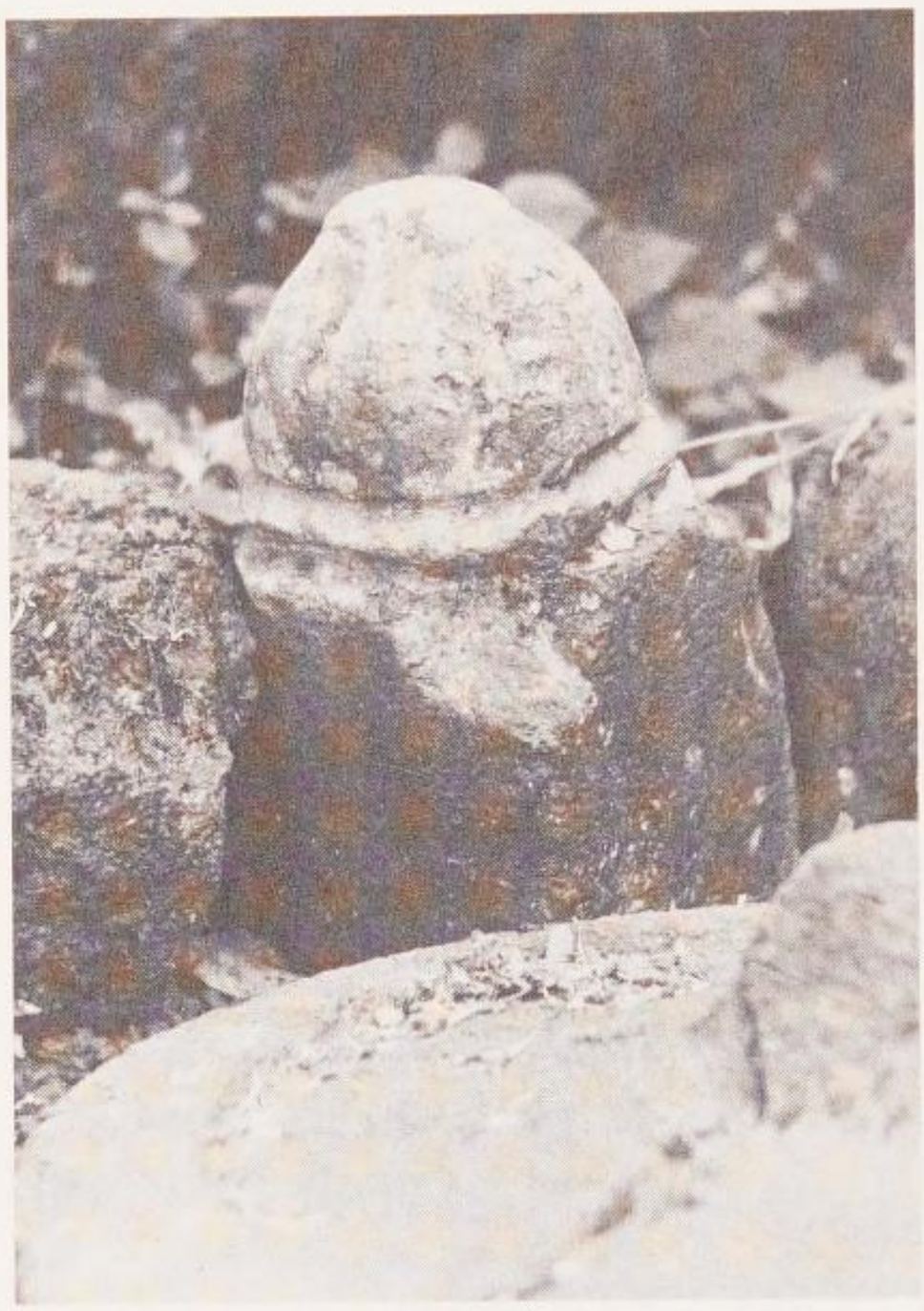

Plate 37. Tryambakeśvar. Caṇḍa and his liṅga in reduced role. P. 84 n. 23 (Madeleine Biardeau)

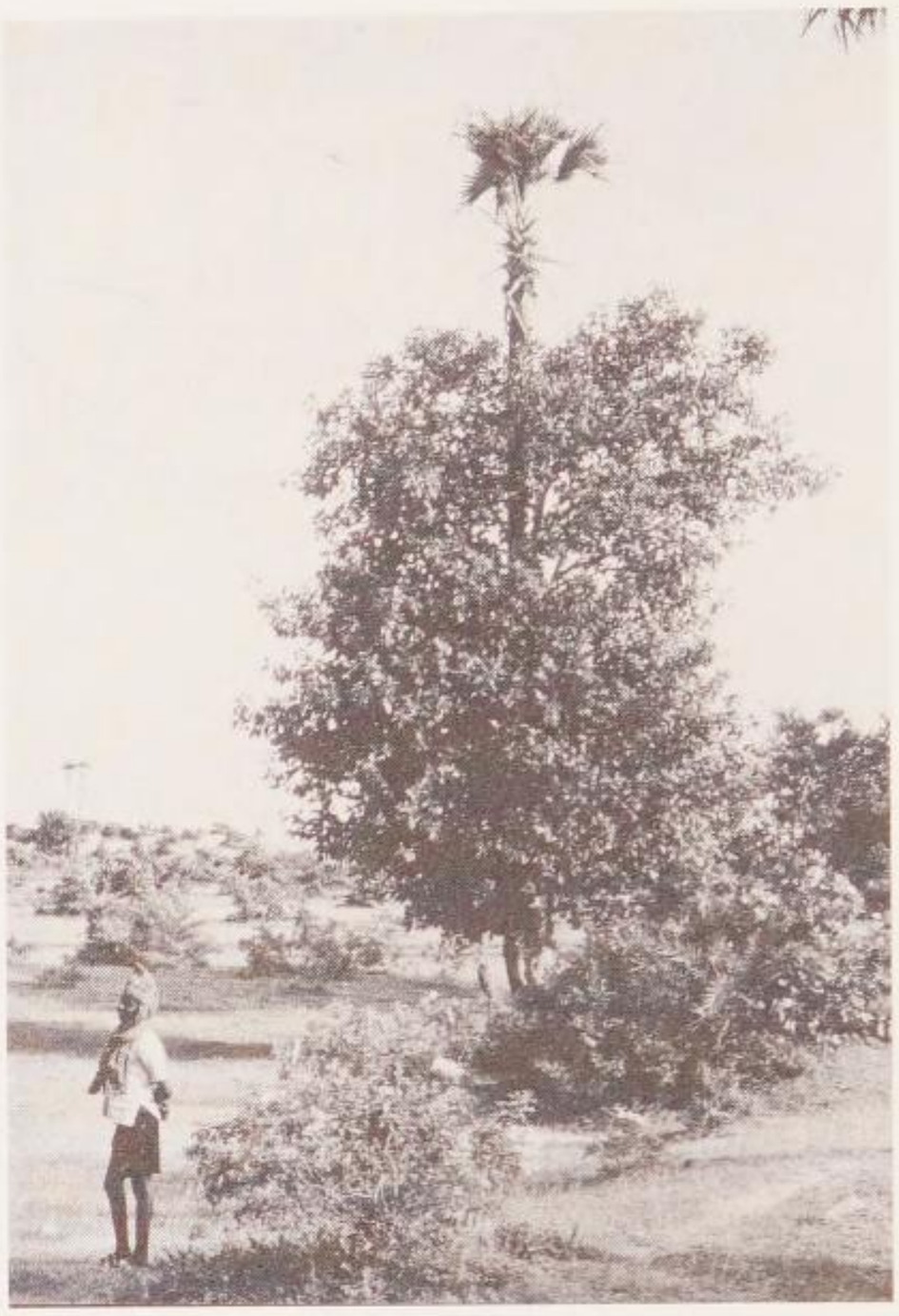

Plate 38. Telangana. Marriage of a borassus and a banyan. P. 87 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 39. Kūṉiccampaṭṭu. Pōtta Rājā of the Draupadiyamman temple. P. 105 n. 7 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 40. Pondicherry. Draupadī festival. Processional Pōtta Rājā with whip used on penitents in the firewalk. Pp. 105 n. 7, 238 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 41. Kūttampākkam. Draupadī temple. Agniskambha and Pōtta Rājā. Pp. 108, 152 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 42. Tiṇḍivaṉam. Boundary stones (?) in form of Pōtta Rājā in front of Draupadī temple. Pp. 111 n. 5, 152 (Alf Hiltebeitel)

Plate 43. Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. Vīraṉ in front of Ammacciyār sanctuary. P. 111 n. 5 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

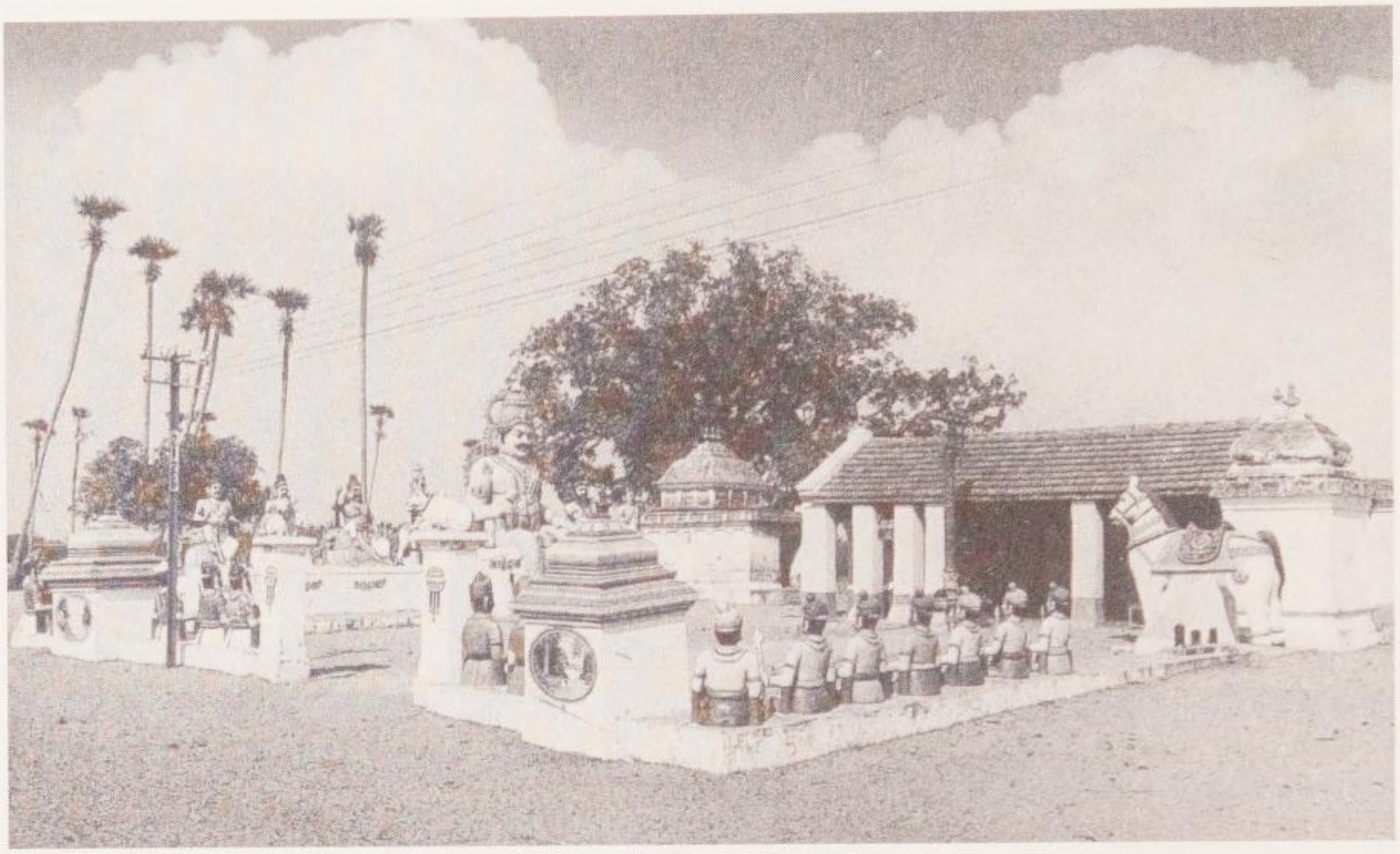

Plate 44. Kuḍikkāḍu. Paccaivāḷiyamman temple. Pp. 117, 154, 276 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

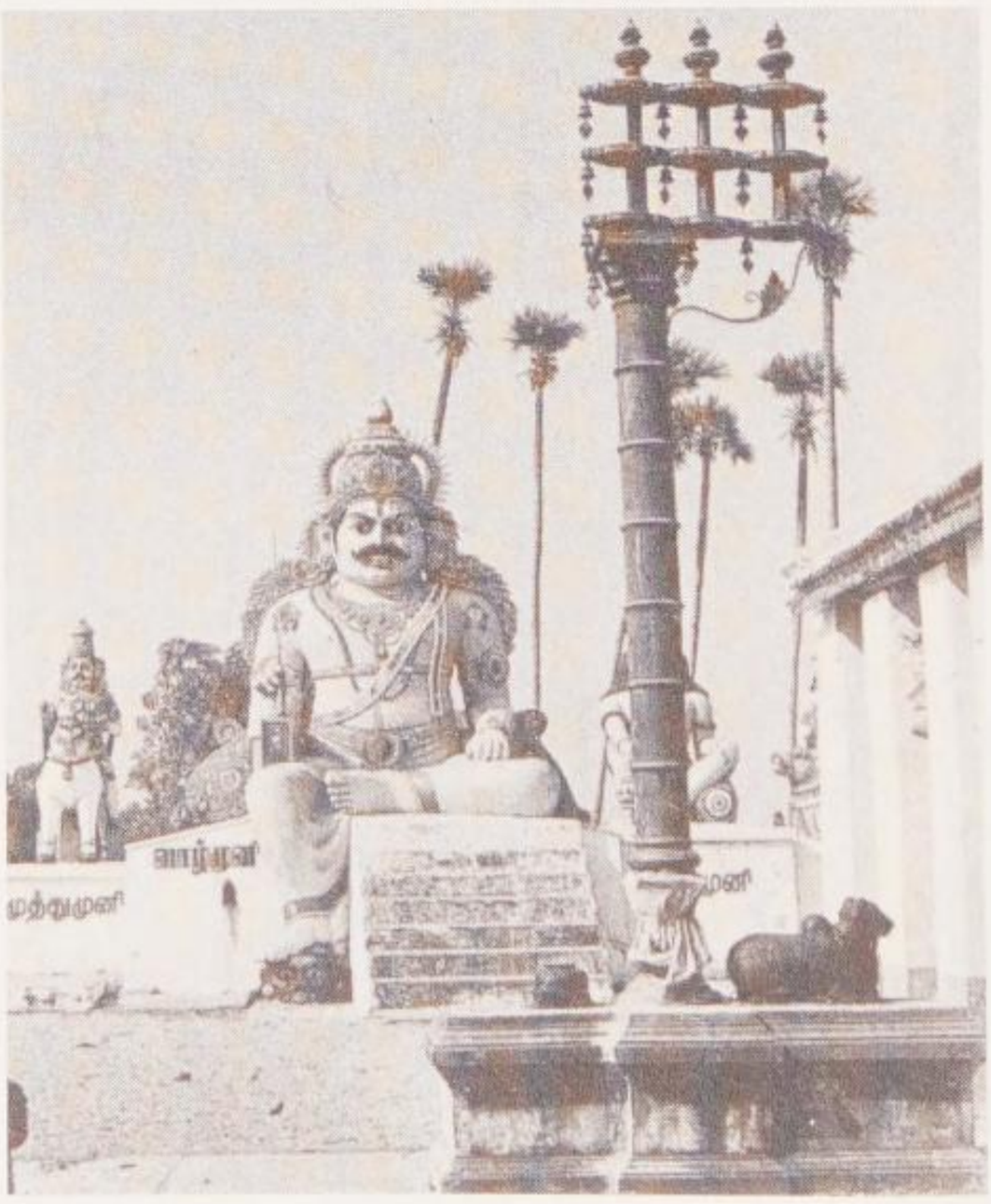

Plate 45. Kuḍikkāḍu. Vāḷmuṉi. Note the severed head under his right foot. Pp. 117, 154, 276 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 46. Ciṉṉakōṭṭakuppam. Paccaivāḷiyamman temple. Agnivīra. Pp. 117, 154, 276 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

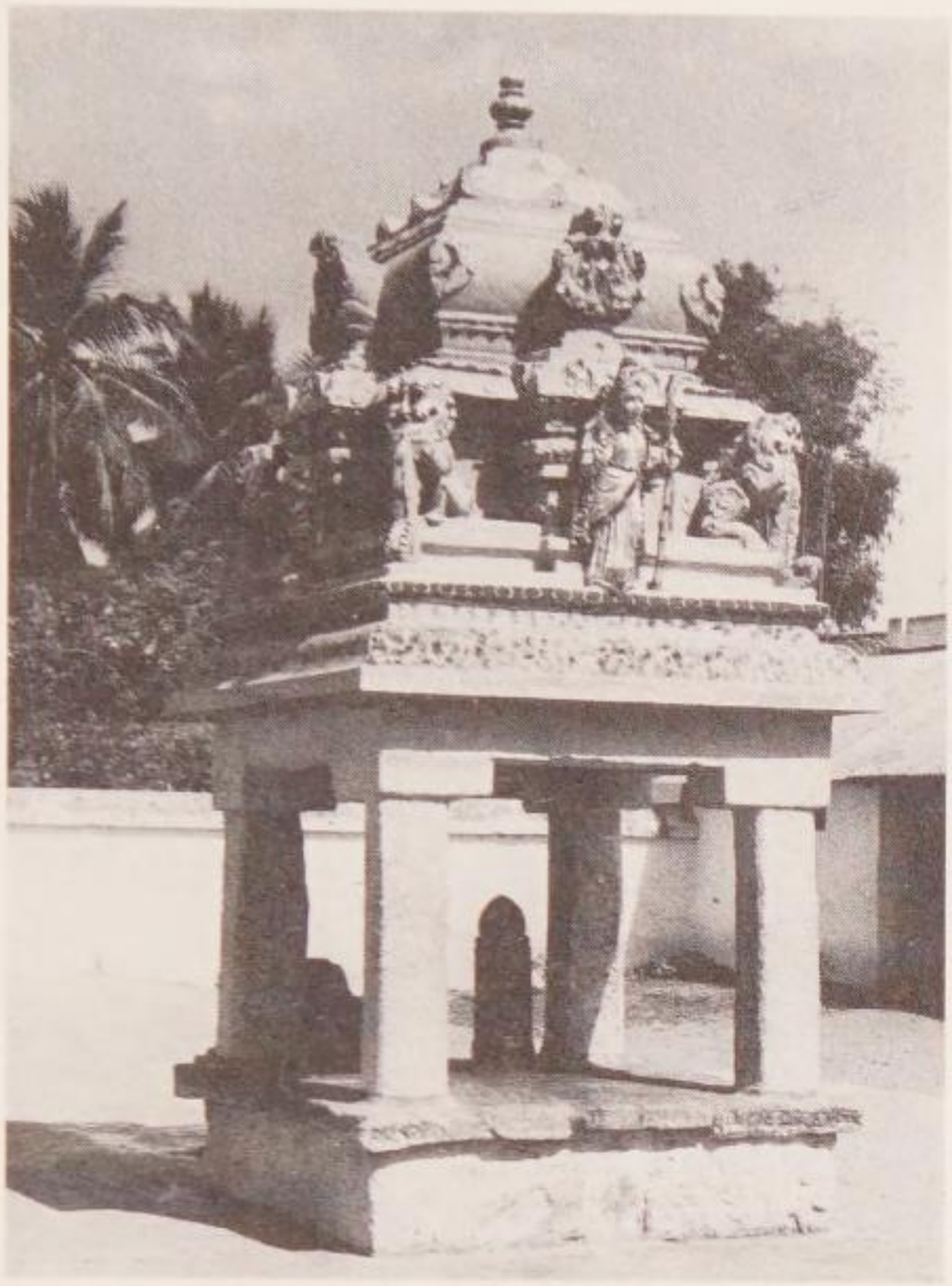

Plate 47. Kāñcipuram. Cantaveḷiyamman temple. Munnaḍiyān facing the sanctuary. P. 113 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 48. Kāñcipuram. Cantaveḷiyamman temple. Munnaḍiyān. P. 113 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 49. Uttaramērūr. Munnaḍiyān before the sanctuary of Mēṟkattamman. P. 118 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

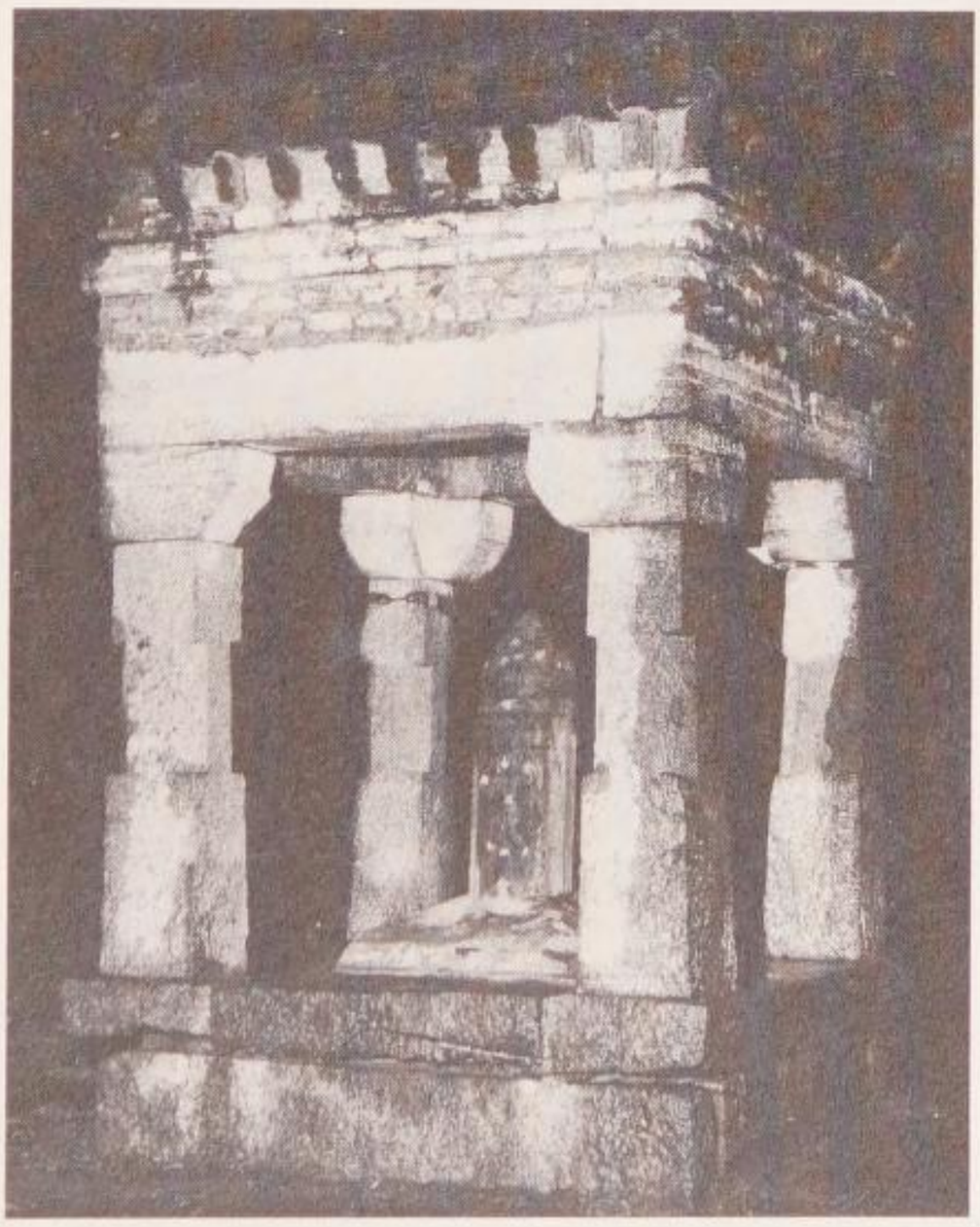

Plate 50. Uttaramērūr. Munnaḍiyān. P. 118 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

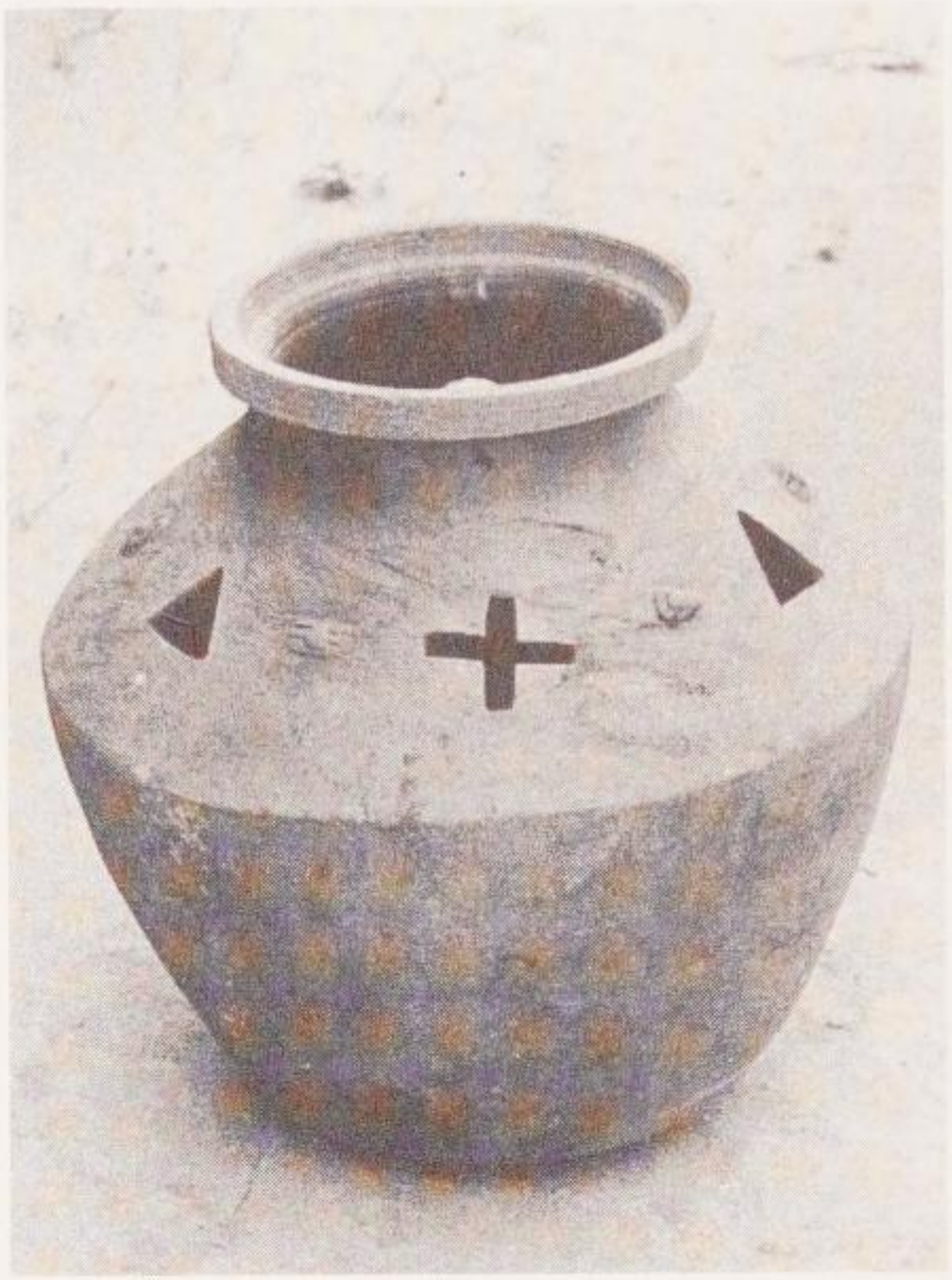

Plate 51. Kanniyakōyil. Paccaivāliyamman temple. Agnikaragam. Pp. 117, 280-81 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 52. Puttūr. Māriyamman temple. "Impalement stake." Pp. 121, 148 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

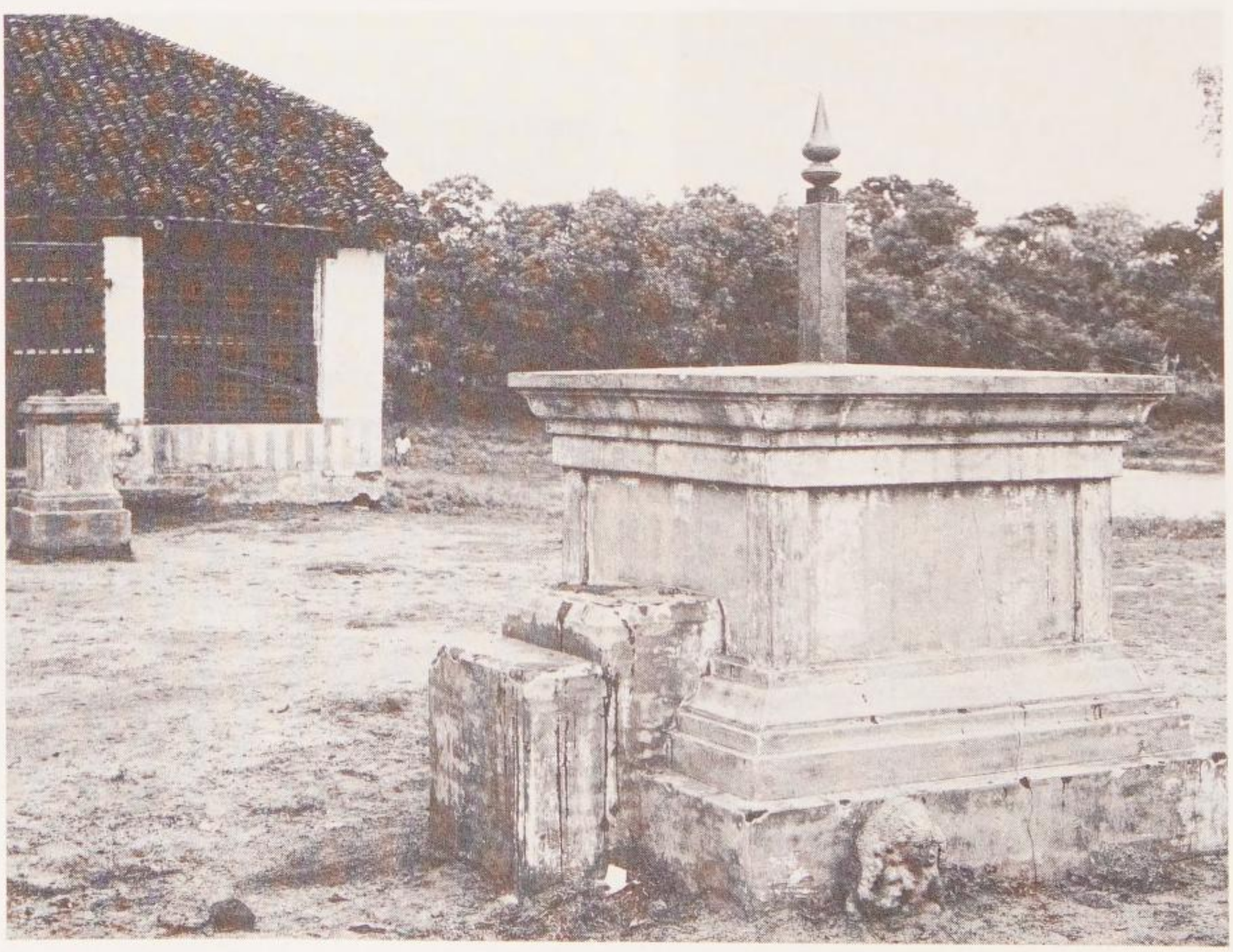

Plate 53. Puttūr. The "impalement stake" before the temple. Pp. 121, 148 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 54. Nāgapaṭṭiṉam. Māriyamman temple. Muṉṉaḍiyāṉ with lion, post, and balipīṭha in front of the Reṇukā sanctuary. P. 125 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 55. Valattūr. Māriyamman temple. Impalement stake and balipīṭha in front of the sanctuary. P. 129 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 56. Valattūr. Māriyamman temple. Impalement stake. P. 129 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

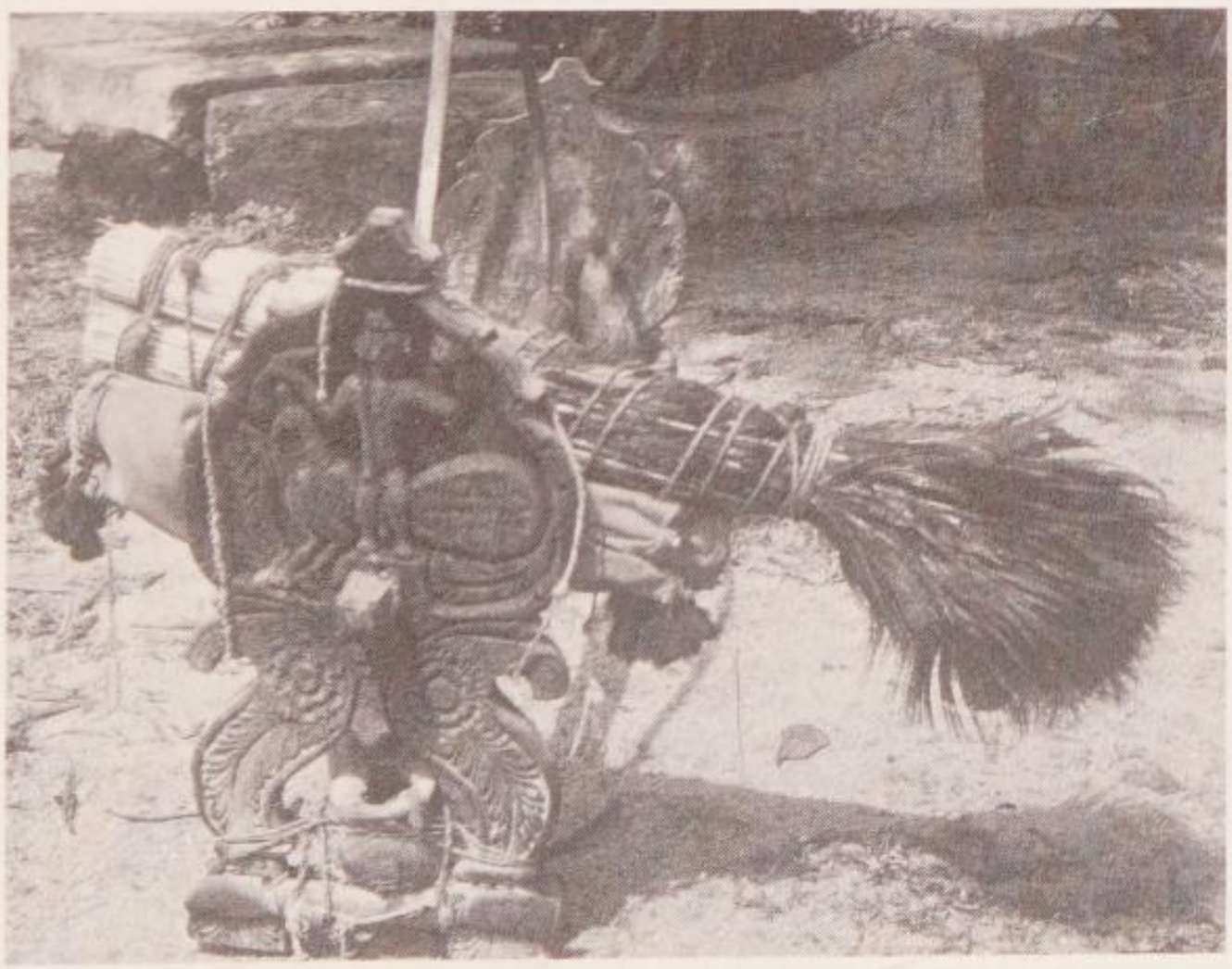

Plate 57. Virālimalai. Kāvaḍi of Subrahmaṇya. P. 131 n. 52 (Madeleine Biardeau)

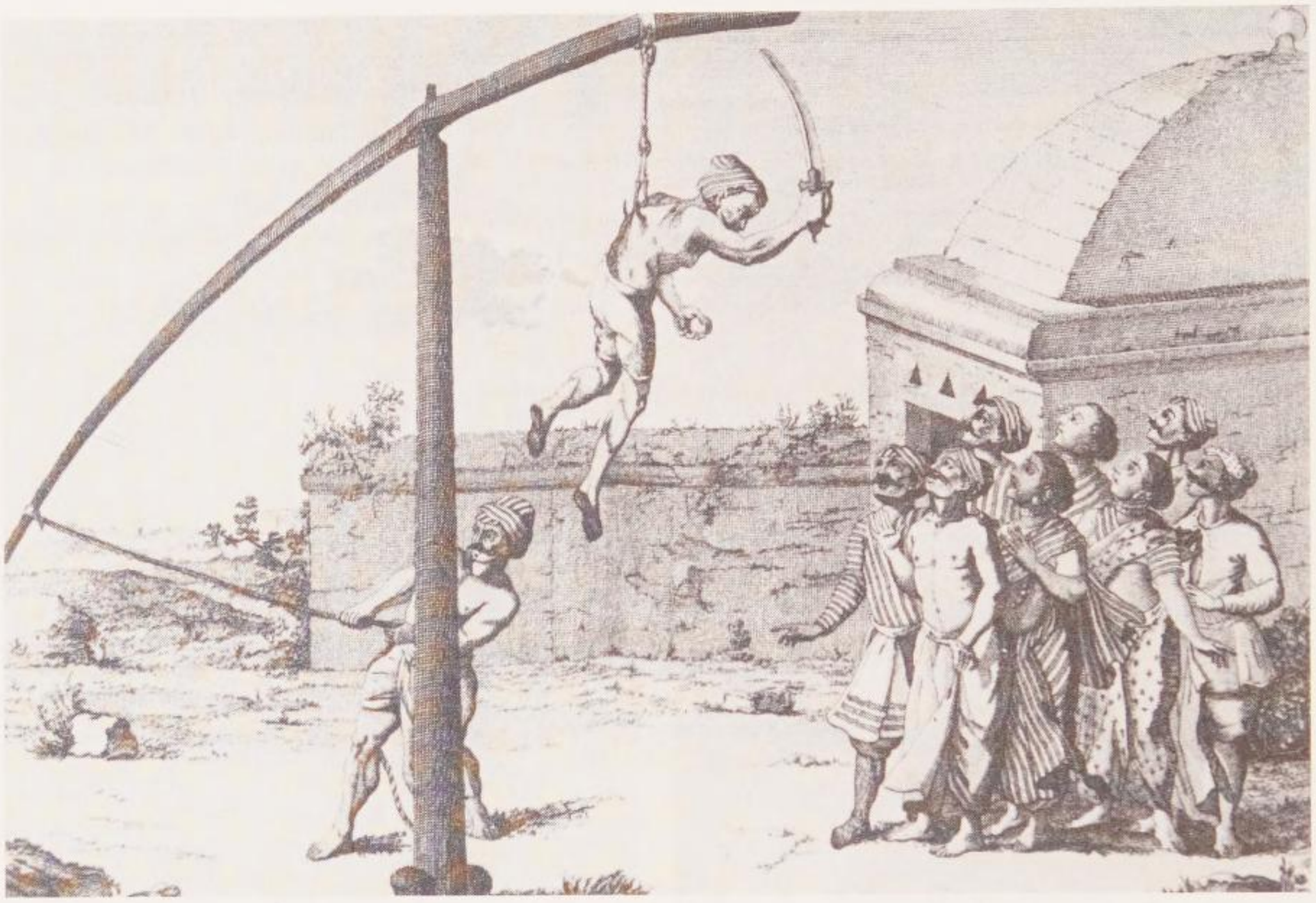

Plate 58. Hook-swinging (from an illustration in Sonnerat 1782, vol. 2, p. 244). P. 125 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 59. Kṣetrapālapuram. Māriyamman̲ temple. Balipīṭha and kaḷumaram. P. 132 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 60. Tirunanriyūr. Māriyamman temple. Kaḷumaram. P. 138 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 61. Tirunanriyūr. Cukkumāndaḍi. Pp. 132, 143 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 62. Tirunanriyūr. Śūla, about a hundred centimeters high. Pp. 128 n. 45, 138 n. 59, 140, 143 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 63. Mēlaperuṅkarai. Cōṇaiyā sanctuary. P. 146 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 64. Mēlaperuṅkarai. Detail. P. 146 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 65. Mēlaperuṅkarai. Impalement stake identified with Cōṇaiyā in the Aiyaṉār sanctuary. P. 146 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 66. Landaikaruṅkulam. Sanctuary and first post. P. 147 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 67. Landaikaruṅkulam. Second post. P. 147 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 68. Landaikaruṅkulam. First post. Pp. 147, 152 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

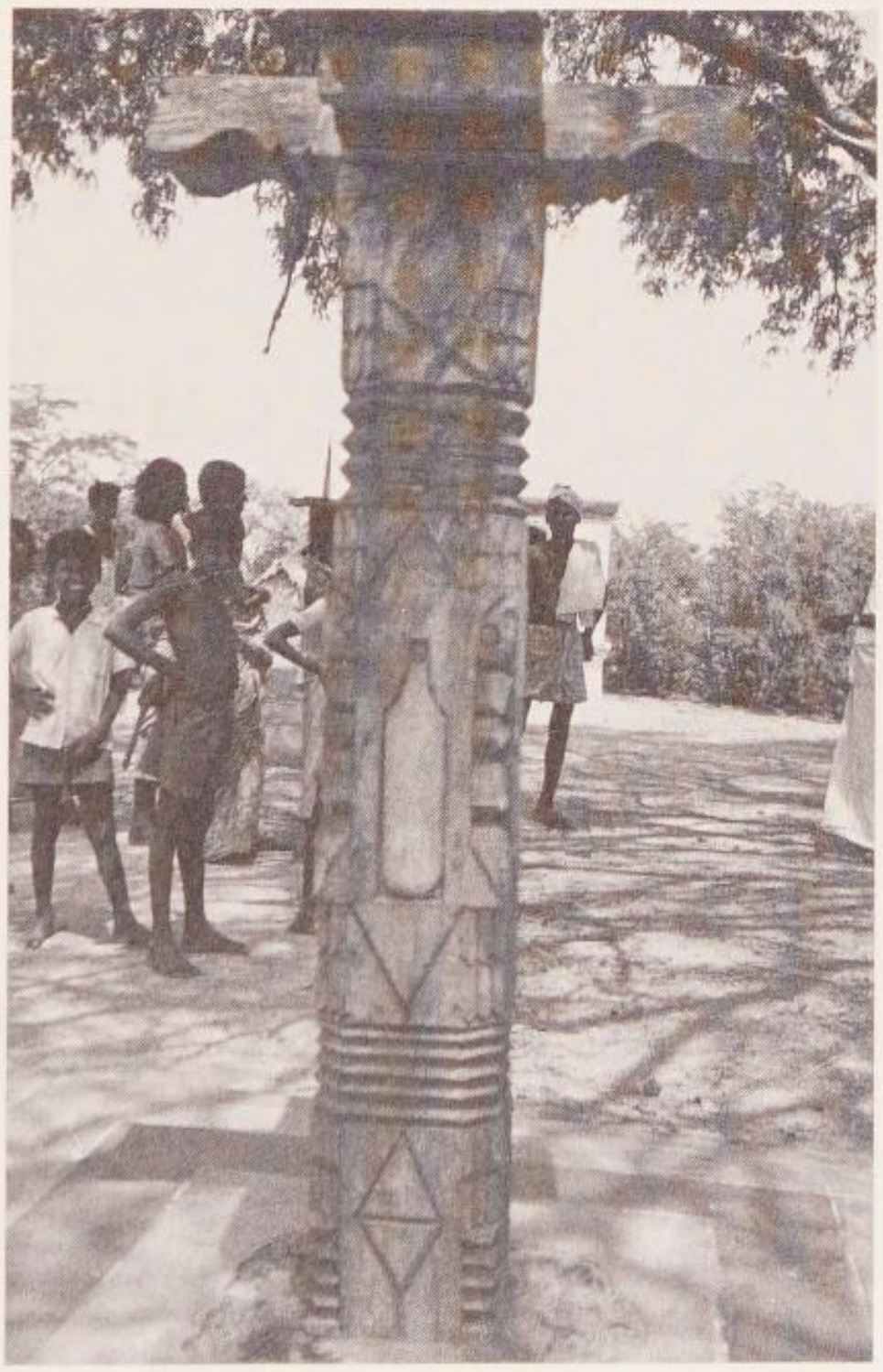

Plate 69. Landaikaruṅkulam. Second post. P. 148 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 70. Itampāṭal. Sanctuary of Vaṭakaraiyan̲. P. 148 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 71. Kaṭukucandaicattiram. Impalement stake in front of Kaṟuppucāmi's sanctuary. P. 148 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 72. Civan̲malai. Upper temple and jyōtistambha of the lower temple. P. 156 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 73. Civanmalai. Śūlakkal at the base of the jyōtistambha. P. 157 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 74. Cennimalai. Muniyappan at Ellaimākāḷiyamman temple. P. 160 (Françoise L'Hernault)

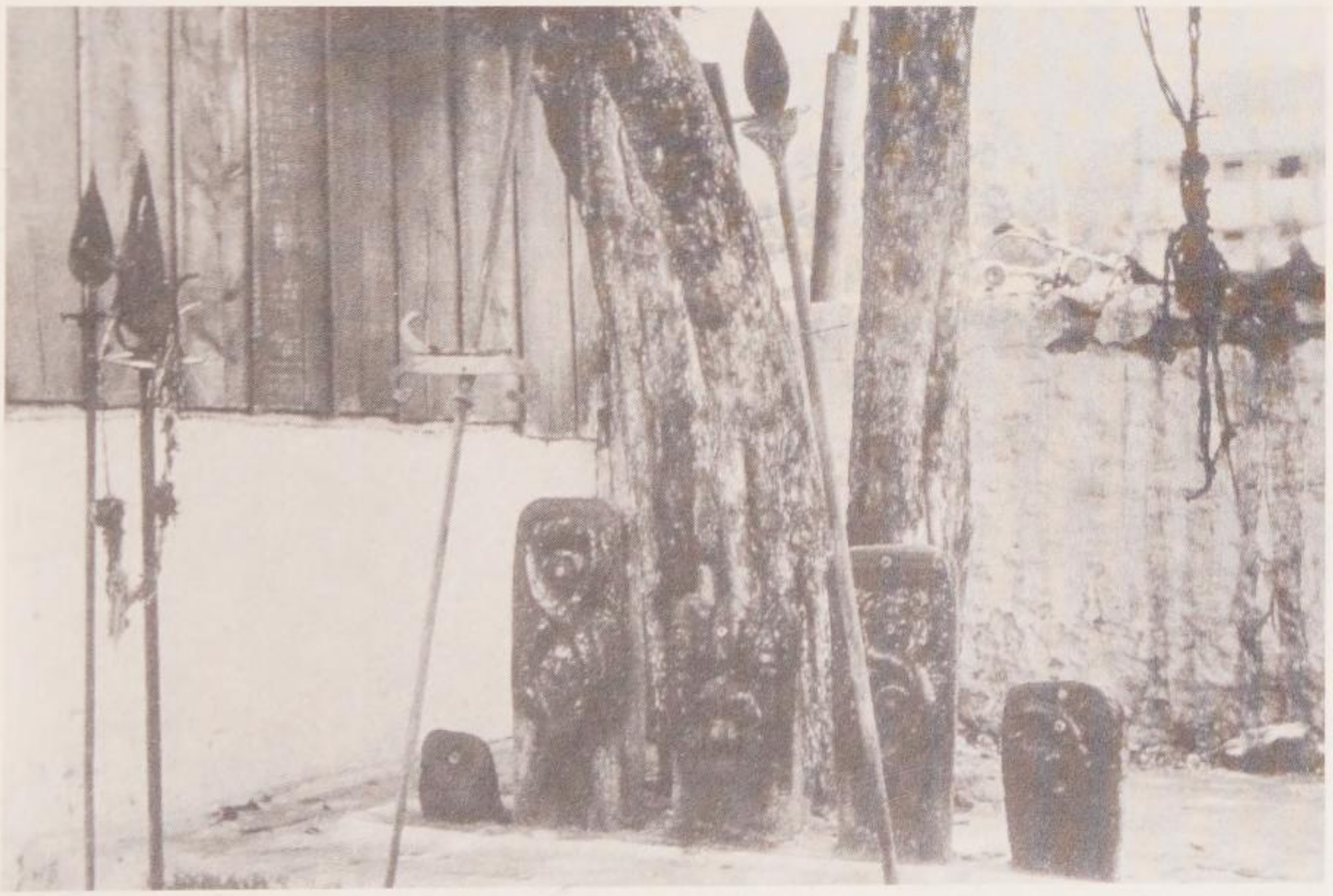

Plate 75. Cennimalai. Sanctuary of Pālamarattu Karuppanacāmi at Ellaimākāḷiyamman temple. P. 160 (Madeleine Biardeau)

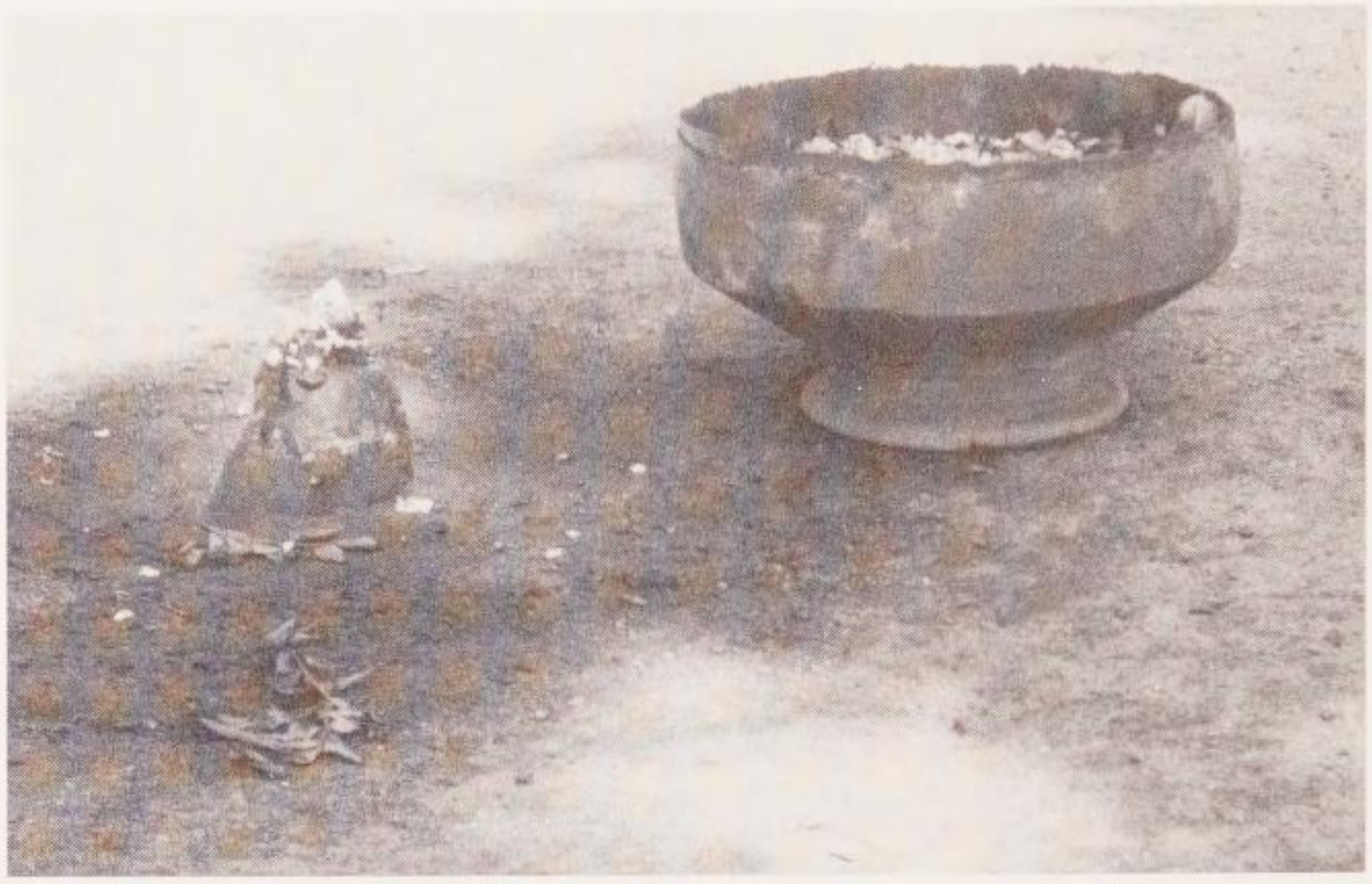

Plate 76. Cennimalai. Karuppu and pū-caṭṭi of the last festival at Māriyamman temple. Pp. 164, 166 (Françoise L'Hernault)

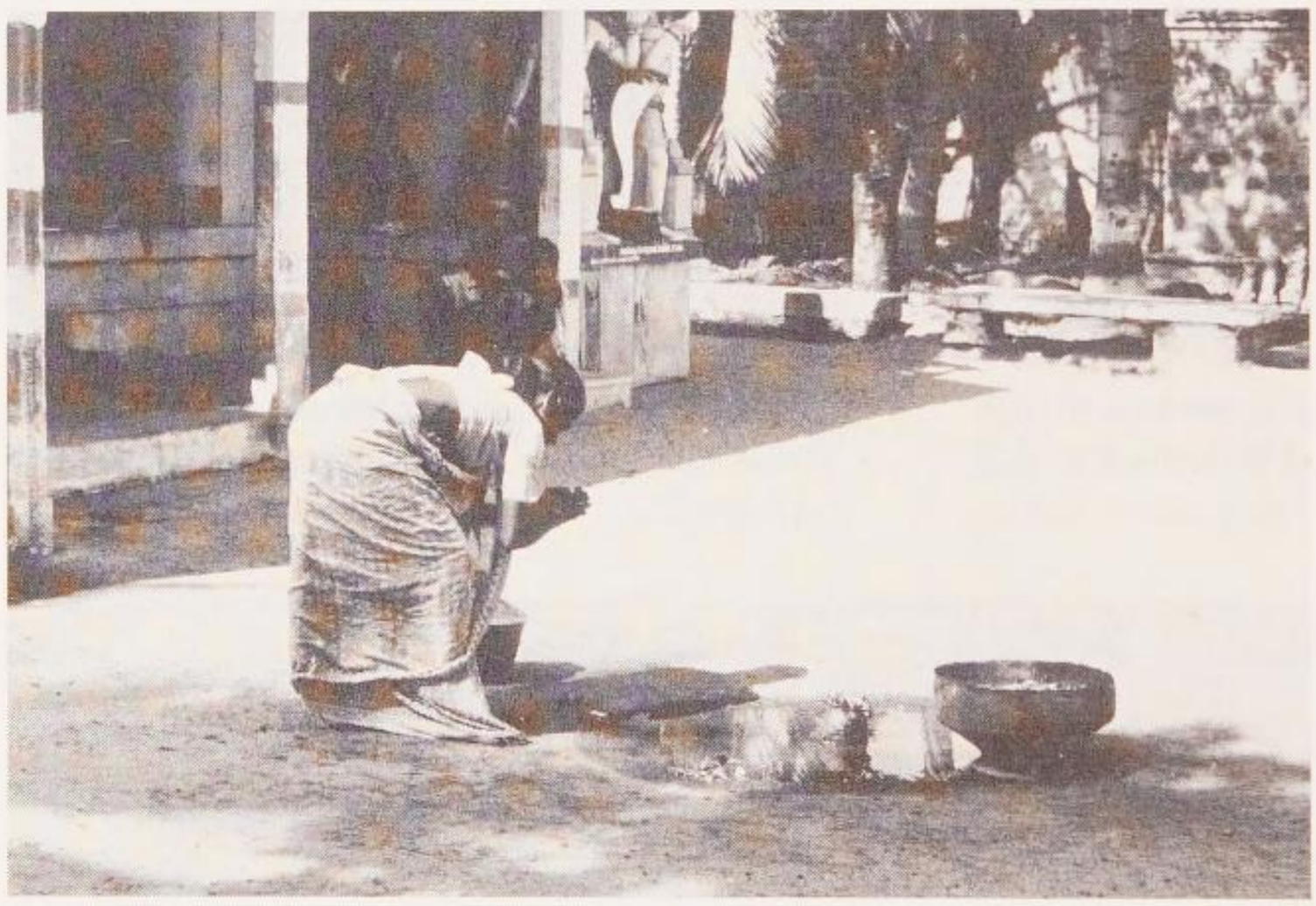

Plate 77. Cennimalai. Private devotion to Kambattu Karuppu before Māriyamman temple. Pp. 164, 168 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 78. Civanmalai. Māriyamman temple with Tūṇaicāmi in foreground to left. P. 178 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 79. Civaṉmalai. Tūṇaicāmi in foreground, Vīrakāḷiyamman temple in background.
P. 178 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 80. Cennimalai. Sanctuary of Karuppu under an iccimaram at Pirāttiyamman temple.
P. 158 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 81. Toṭṭampatti. Mahākāḷiyamman temple. P. 192 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 82. Toṭṭampatti. Muniyappan. Pp. 192, 197 (Françoise L'Hernault)

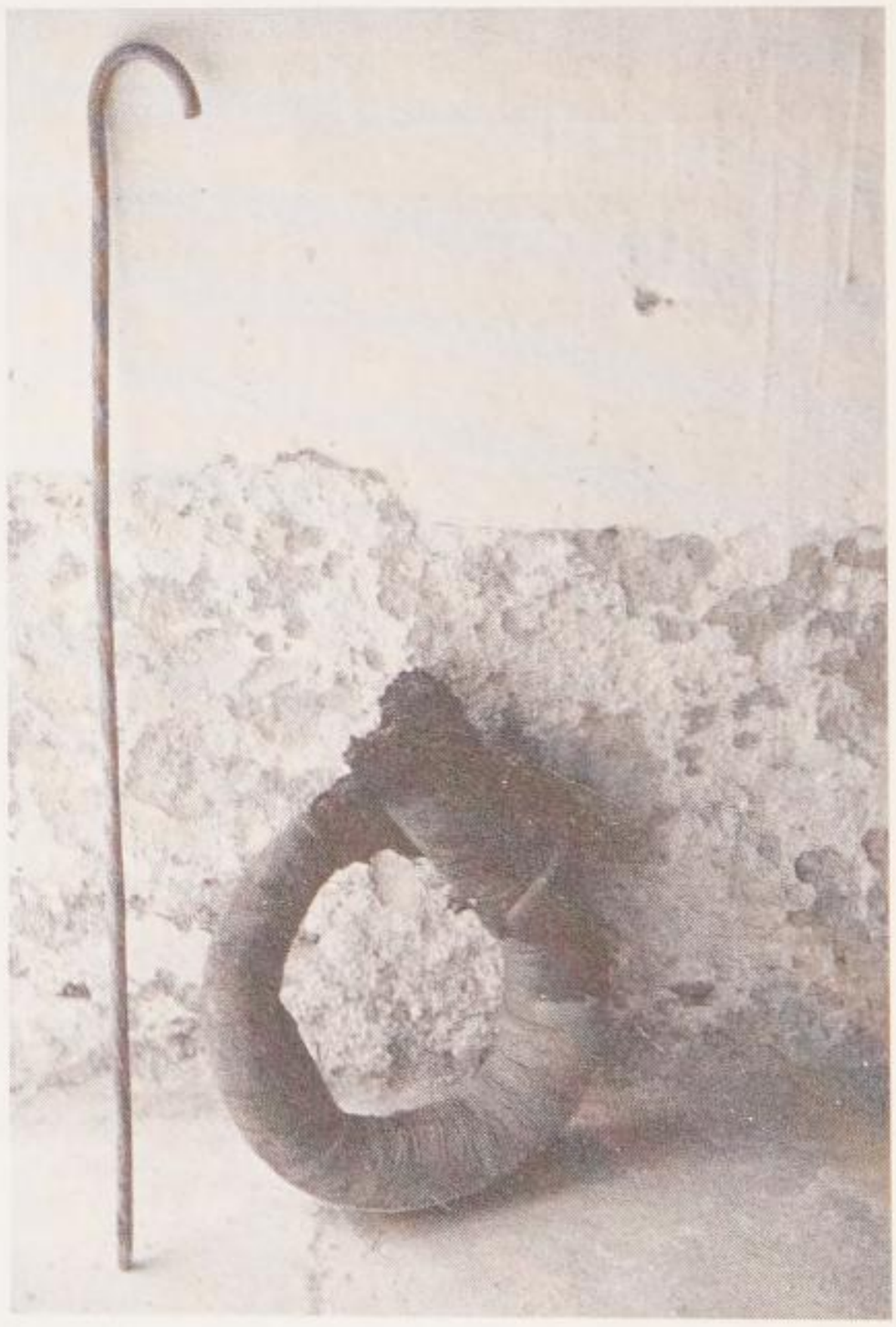

Plate 83. Toṭṭampatti. Coiled torch. Pp. 193, 197, 253 (Françoise L'Hernault)

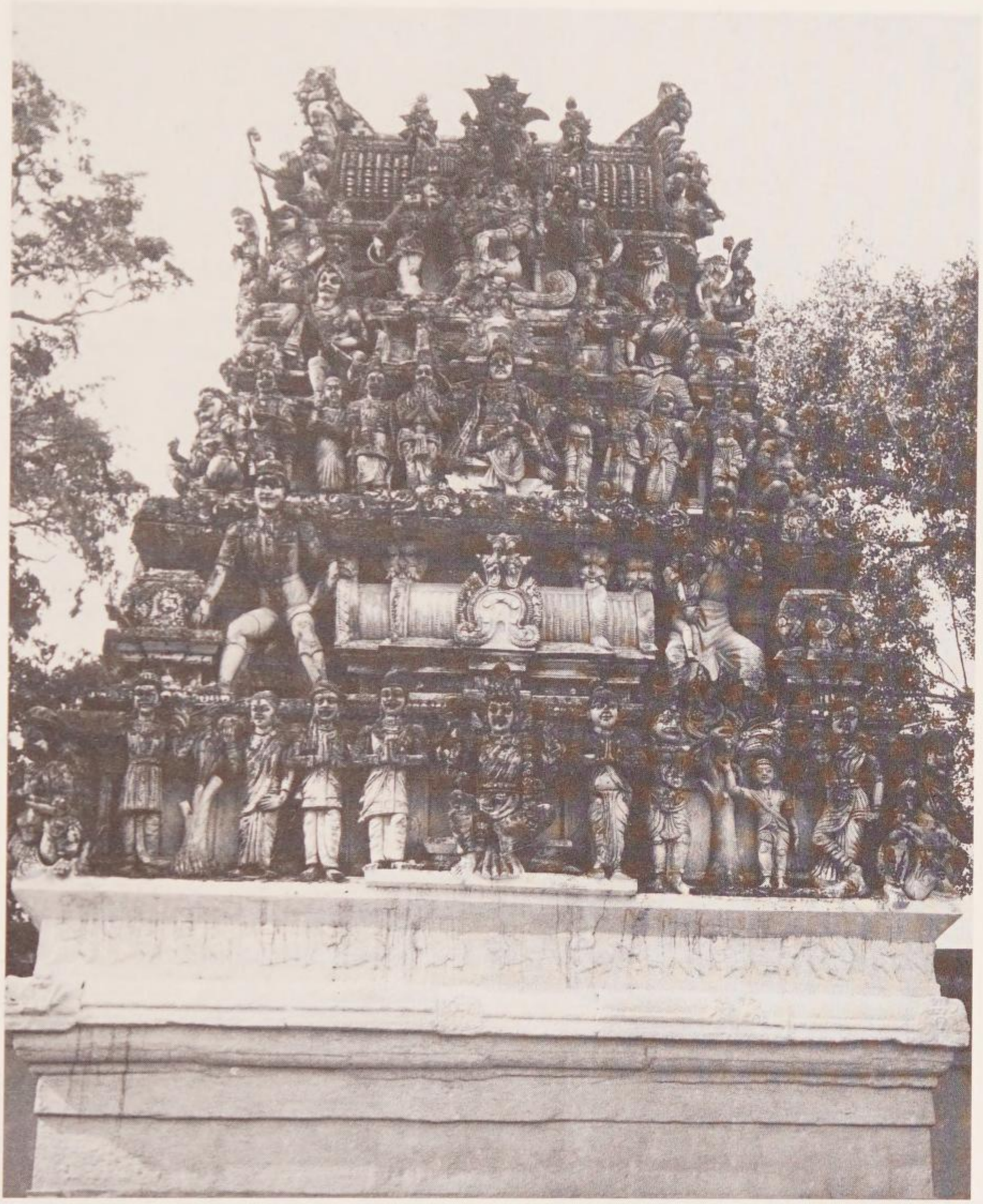

Plate 84. Dhārāpuram. Tillāpuri Amman temple. Episode of the śamī on lower right. P. 205 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

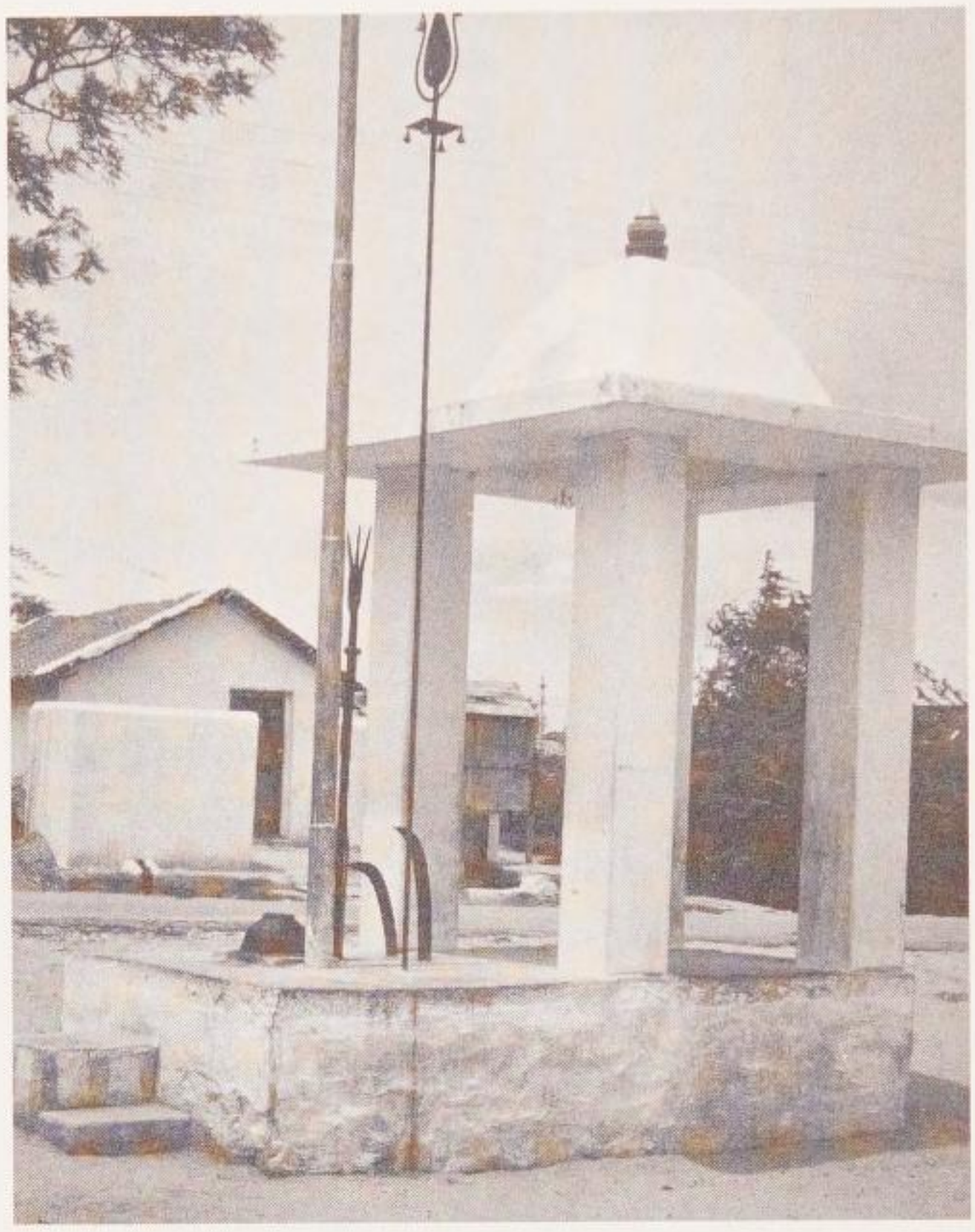

Plate 85. Dhārāpuram. Karuppaṉacāmi at Periya Kāḷiyamman temple. Pp. 205, 248, 272 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 86. Kārattoḻuvūr. Aḻagaṉaṭciyamman temple. Pp. 70 n. 24, 206, 213 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 87. Dhārāpuram. Stone kampam before Māriyamman temple. P. 209 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Plate 88. Cēranmādēvi. Vanniyarāyan. P. 236 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 89. Gaṅgaikoṇḍam. Stones covering over the buffalo at the bottom of the steps. P. 234 (Madeleine Biardeau)

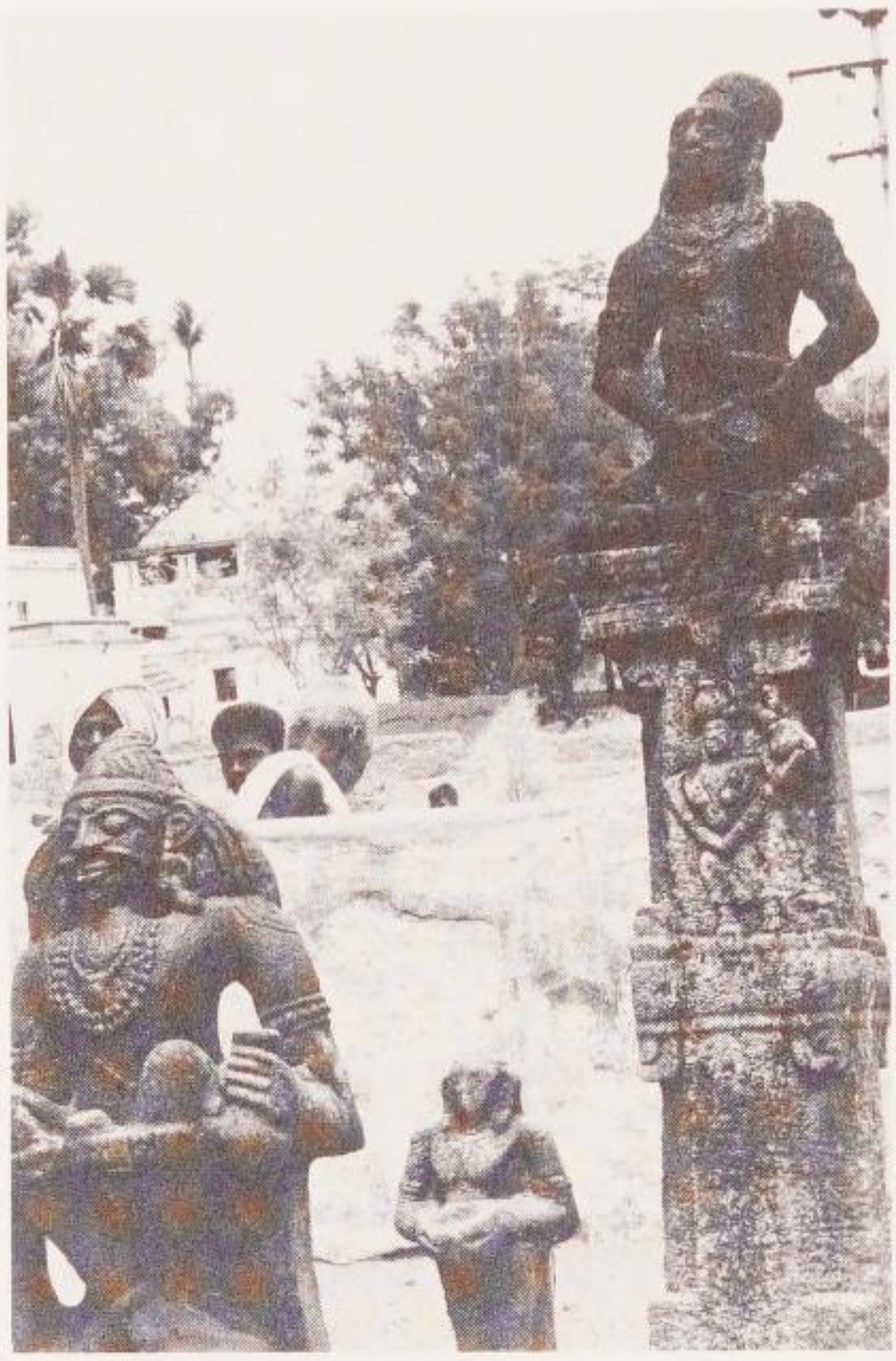

Plate 90. Prañcēri. Kāttavarāyan on his impalement stake facing the goddess temples. Pp. 237 n. 188, 248 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 91. Prañcēri. Kāttavarāyan. Note the object in the form of a mortar in his hand. Pp. 237 n. 188, 248 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

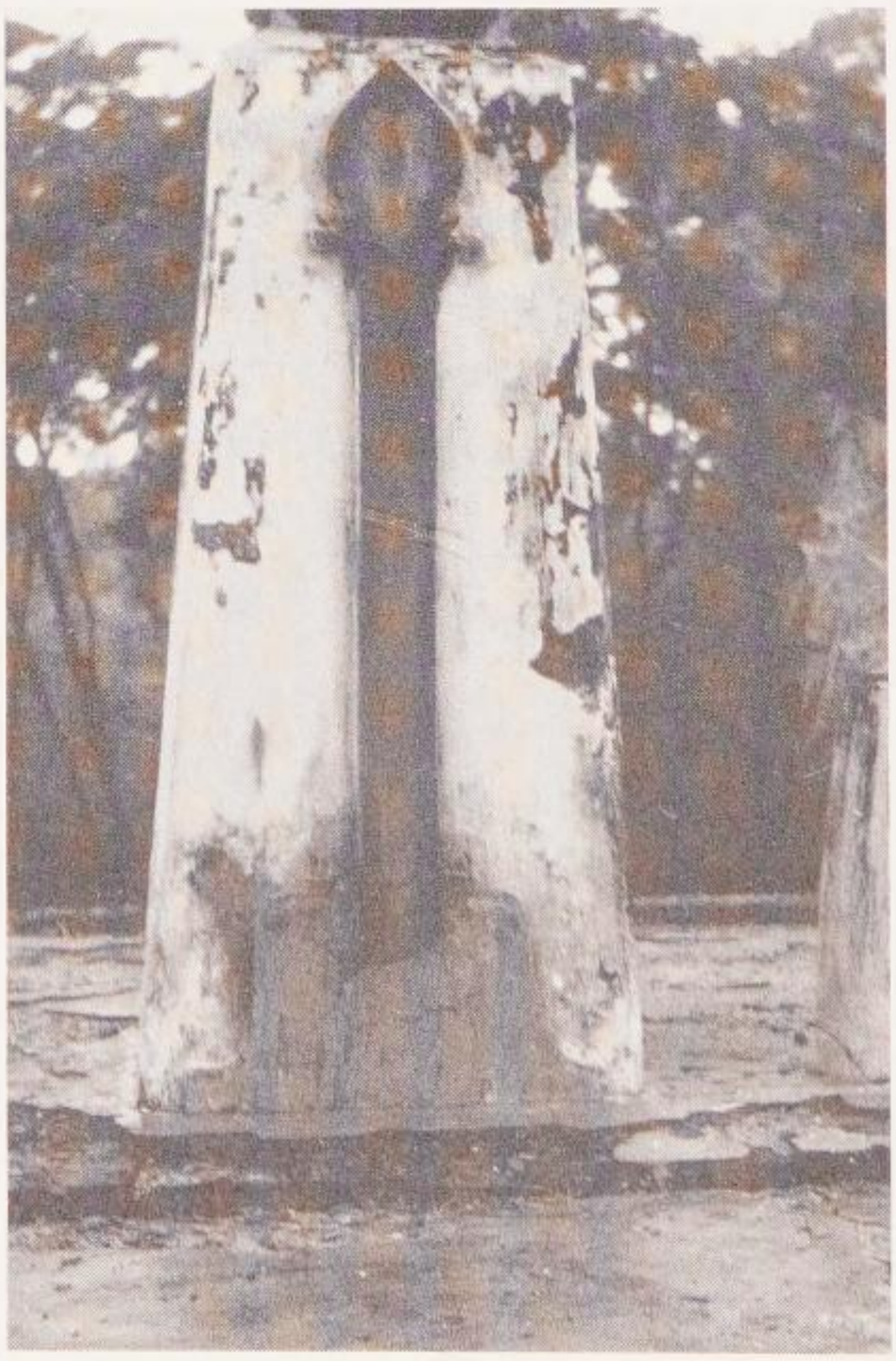

Plate 92. Śrīvaikuṇṭam. Suḍalai Māḍan. P. 237 (Madeleine Biardeau)

Plate 93. Cēraṉmādēvi. Pīḍam of a Māḍan. P. 237 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 94. Near Pattamaḍai. Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. P. 238 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

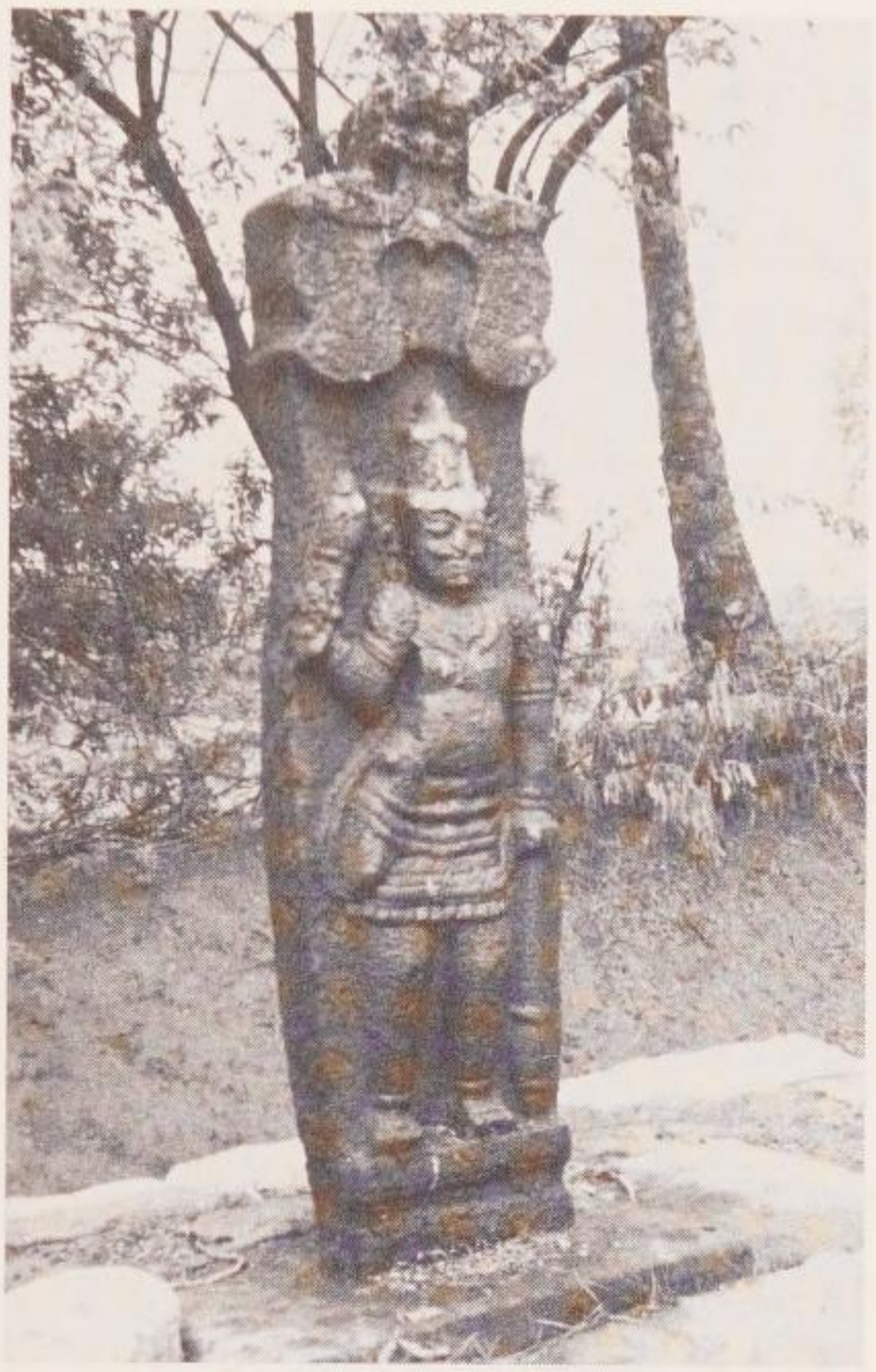

Plate 95. Mēlcēval. Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. P. 238 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 96. Near Koḻumaḍai. Taḷavāy Māḍaṉ and his wife. P. 238 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 97. Nanjangud. Jyeṣṭhā. P. 239 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

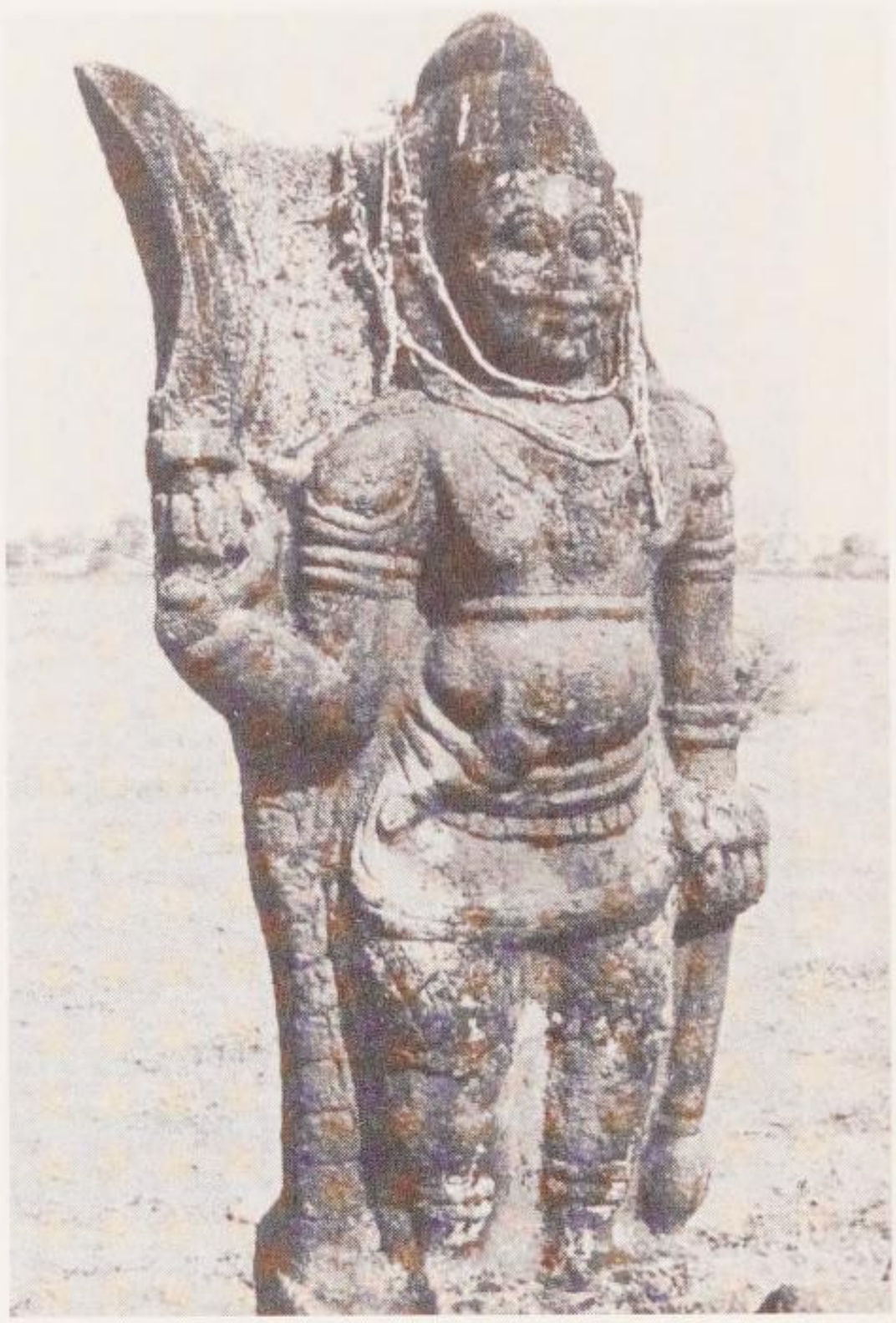

Plate 98. Near Pattamaḍai. Kaṟuppu. P. 249 (Marie-Louise Reiniche)

Plate 99. Mēlaperuṅkarai. Kaṟuppaiyaṉ. P. 249 (Madeleine Biardeau)

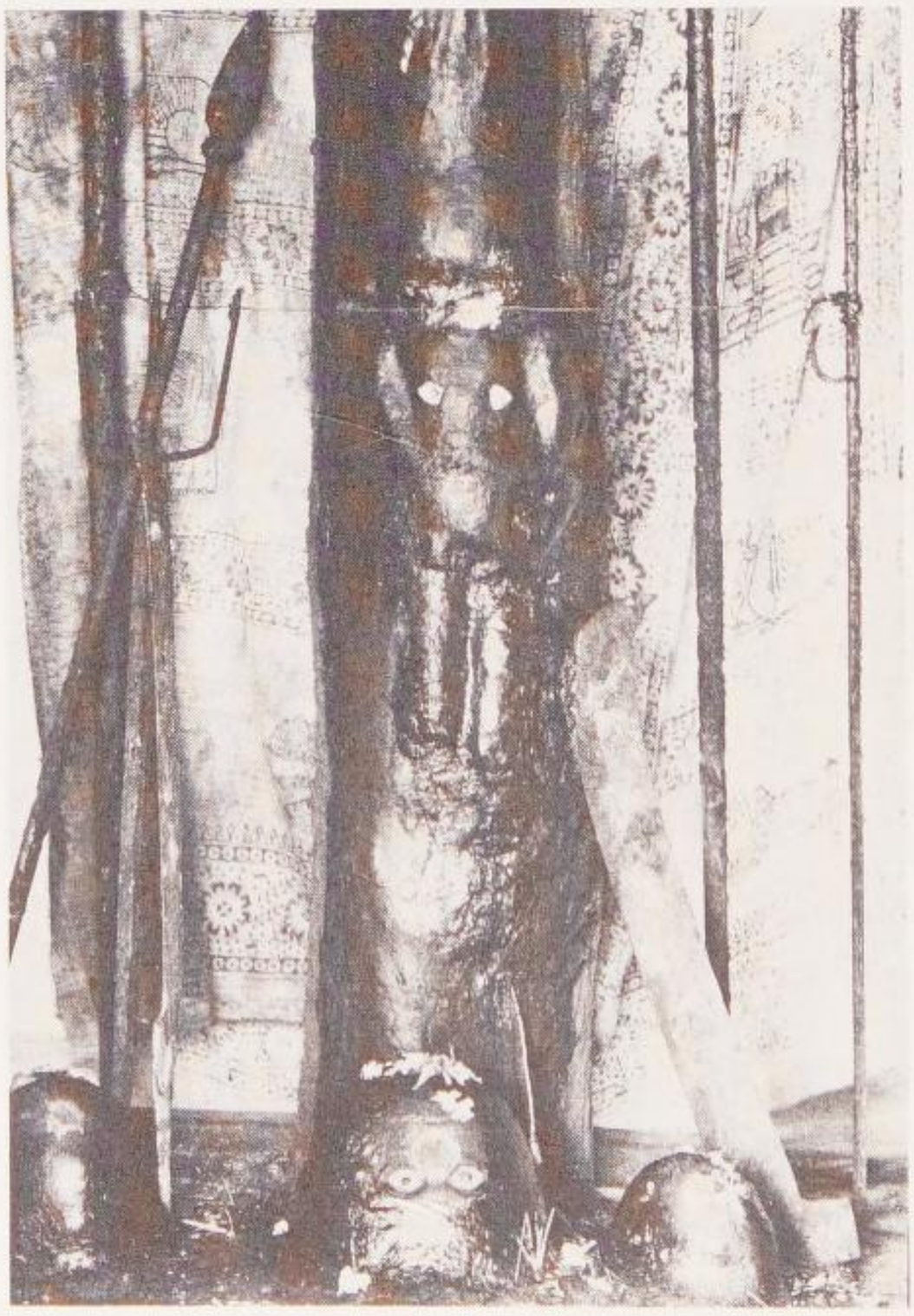

Plate 100. Kōyilvaḷi. Kaṟuppurāyacāmi in the form of a Vedic puruṣa sculpted on the trunk of a bilva tree. Pp. 34 n. 5, 249 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

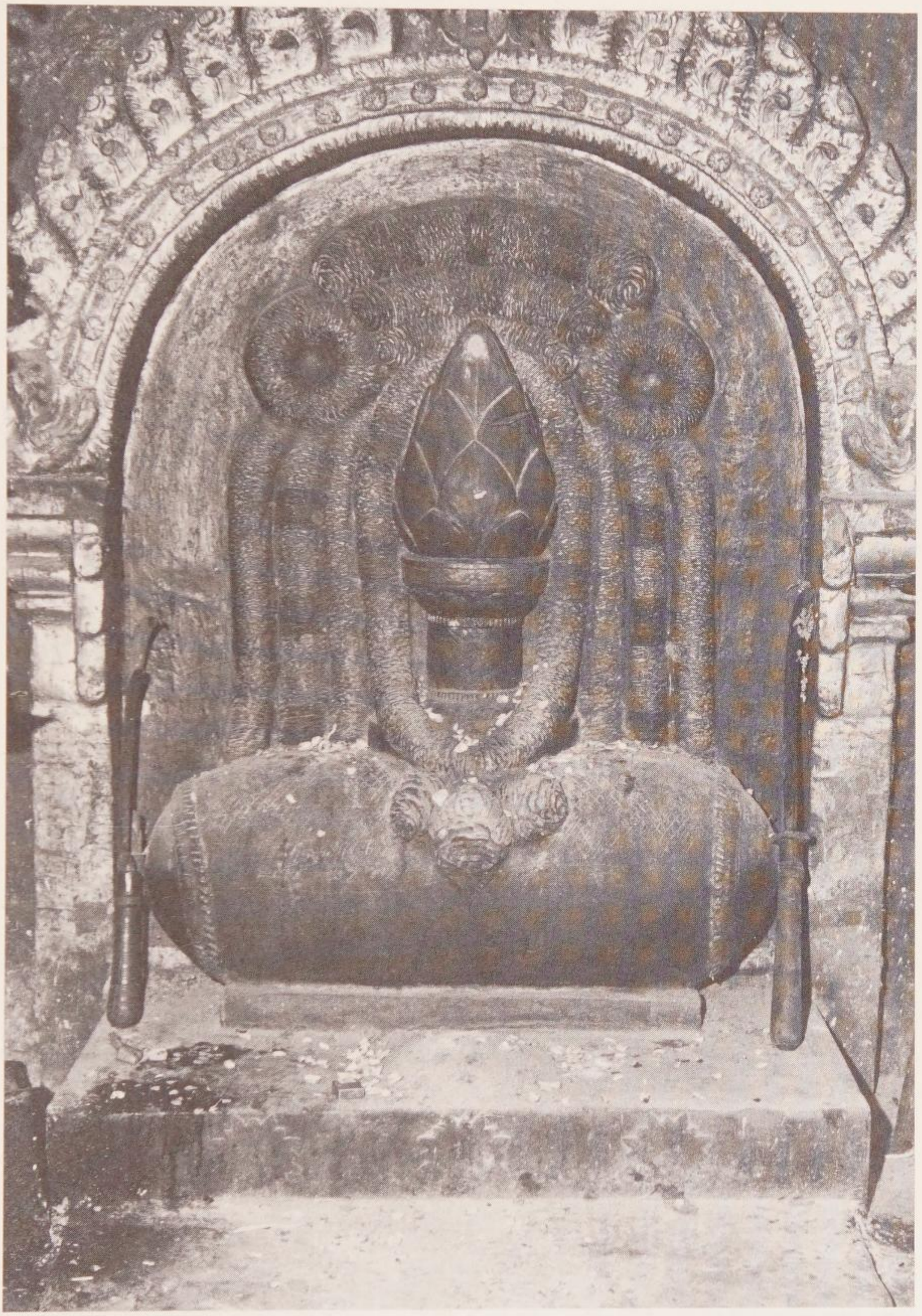

Plate 101. Samayapuram. Karuppu. P. 253 (Françoise L'Hernault)

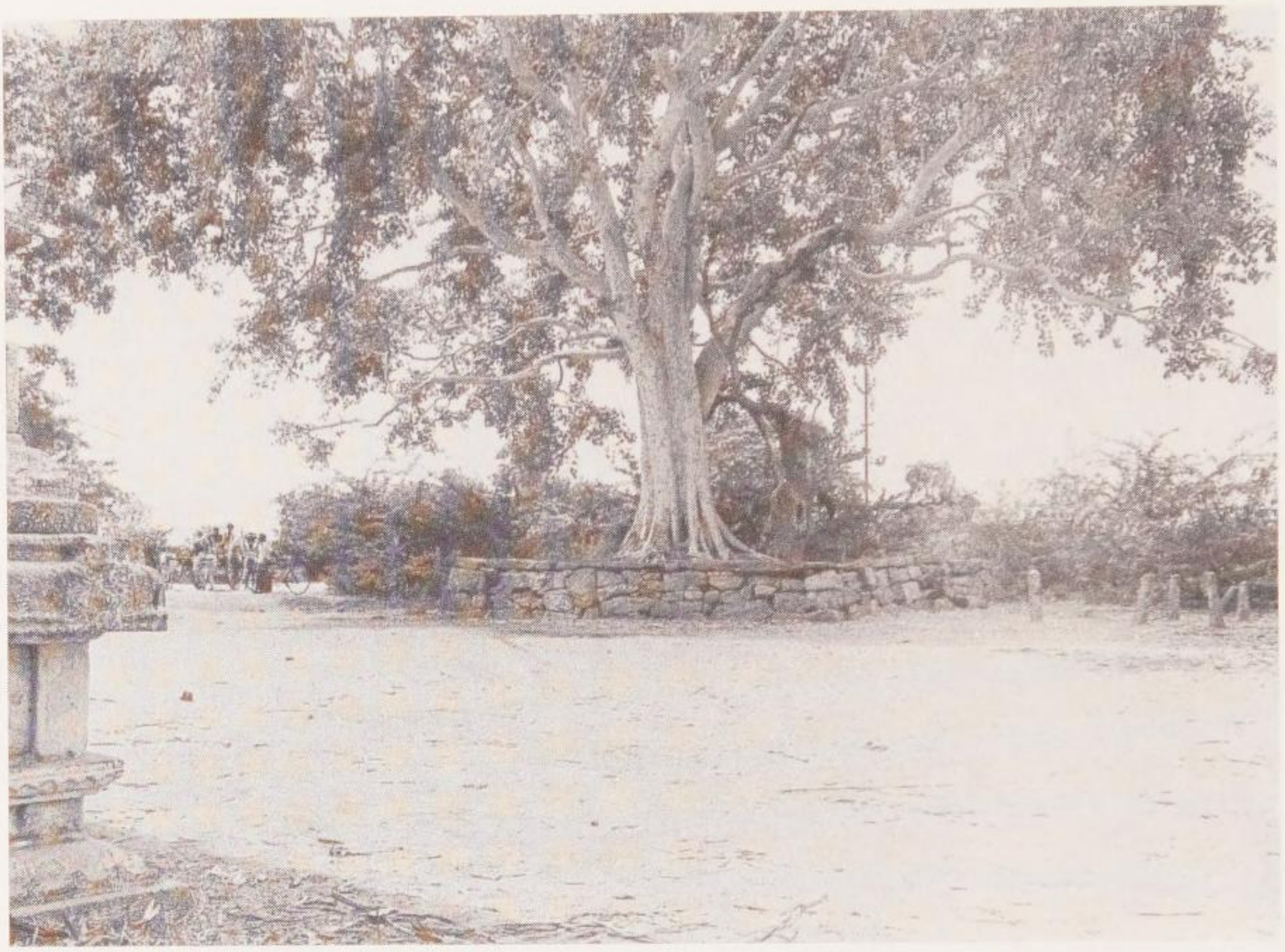

Plate 102. Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam. Pipal and śamī before the temple of Maṅgalanāyakī. P. 259 (Françoise L'Hernault)

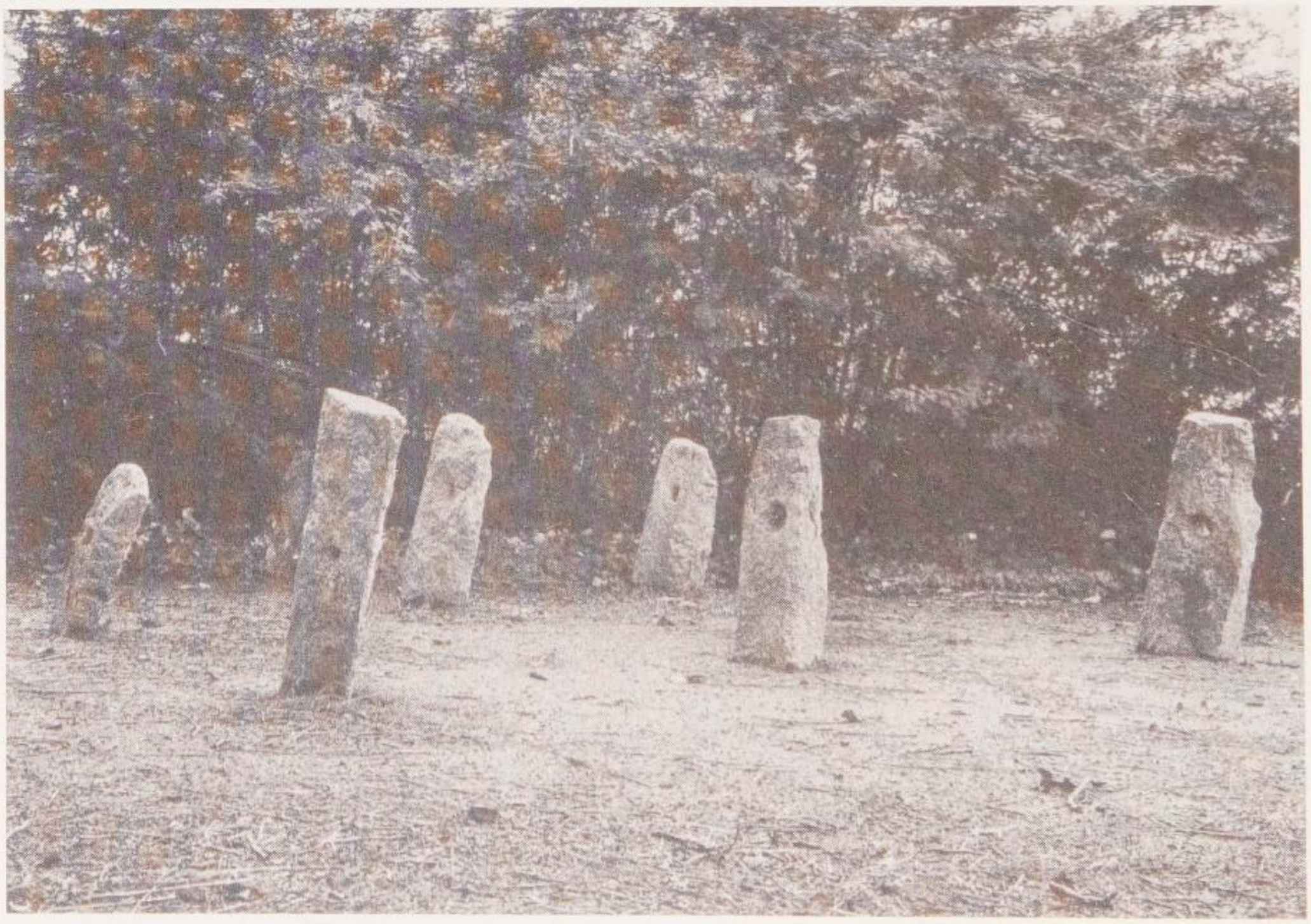

Plate 103. Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam. Six of the seven posts for the buffalo sacrifice. P. 259 (Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

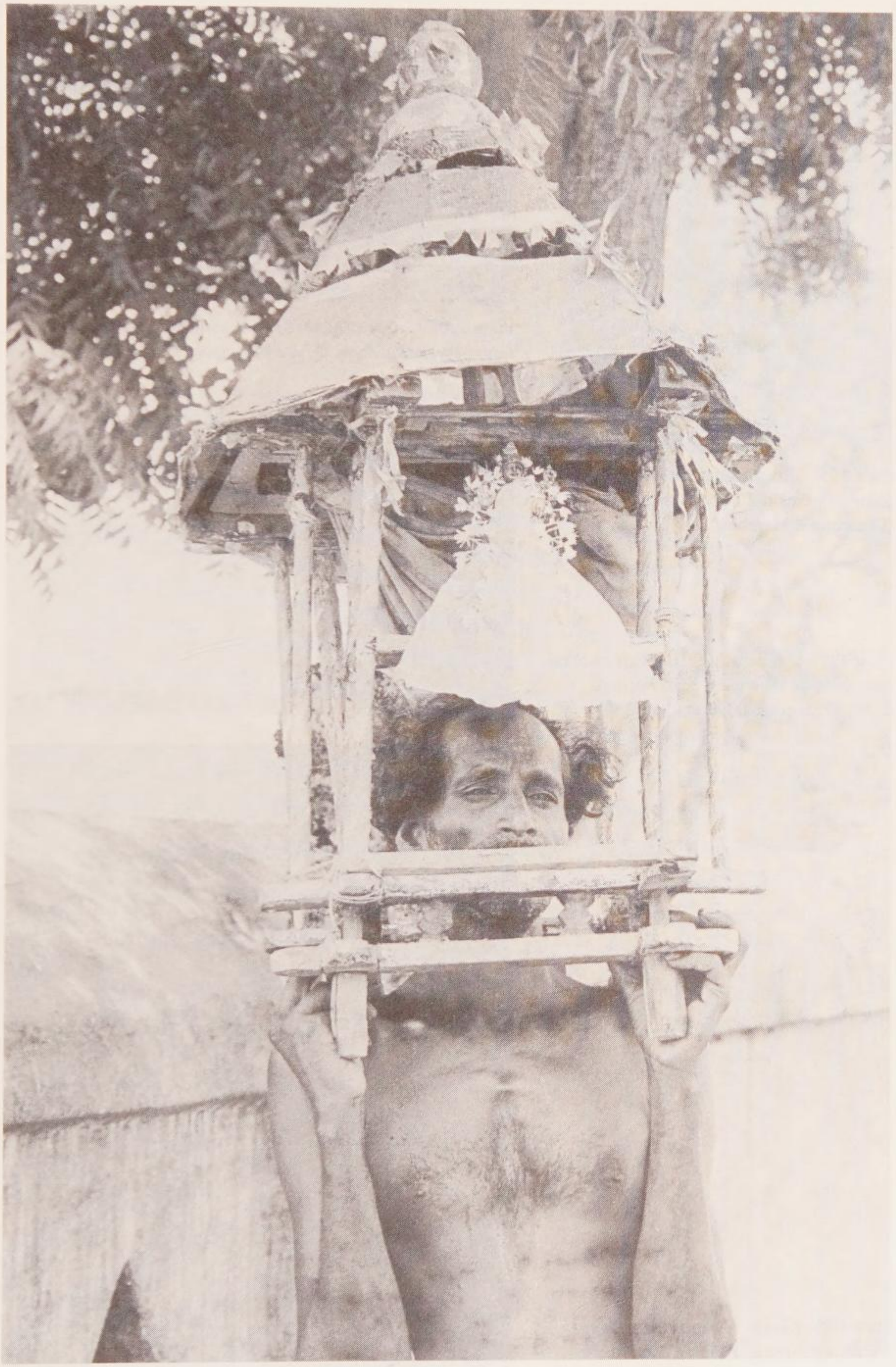

Plate 104. Kanniyakōyil. Paccaivāliyamman temple. Pūntēr. P. 280 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 105. Uttanahalli. Stone with pādukas near the Bhairava chapel. P. 303 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 106. Uttanahalli. Stone with pādukas near the Śiva sanctuary, left portion. P. 303 (Françoise L'Hernault)

Plate 107. Uttanahalli. Stone with pādukas near the Śiva sanctuary, right portion. P. 303 (Françoise L'Hernault)

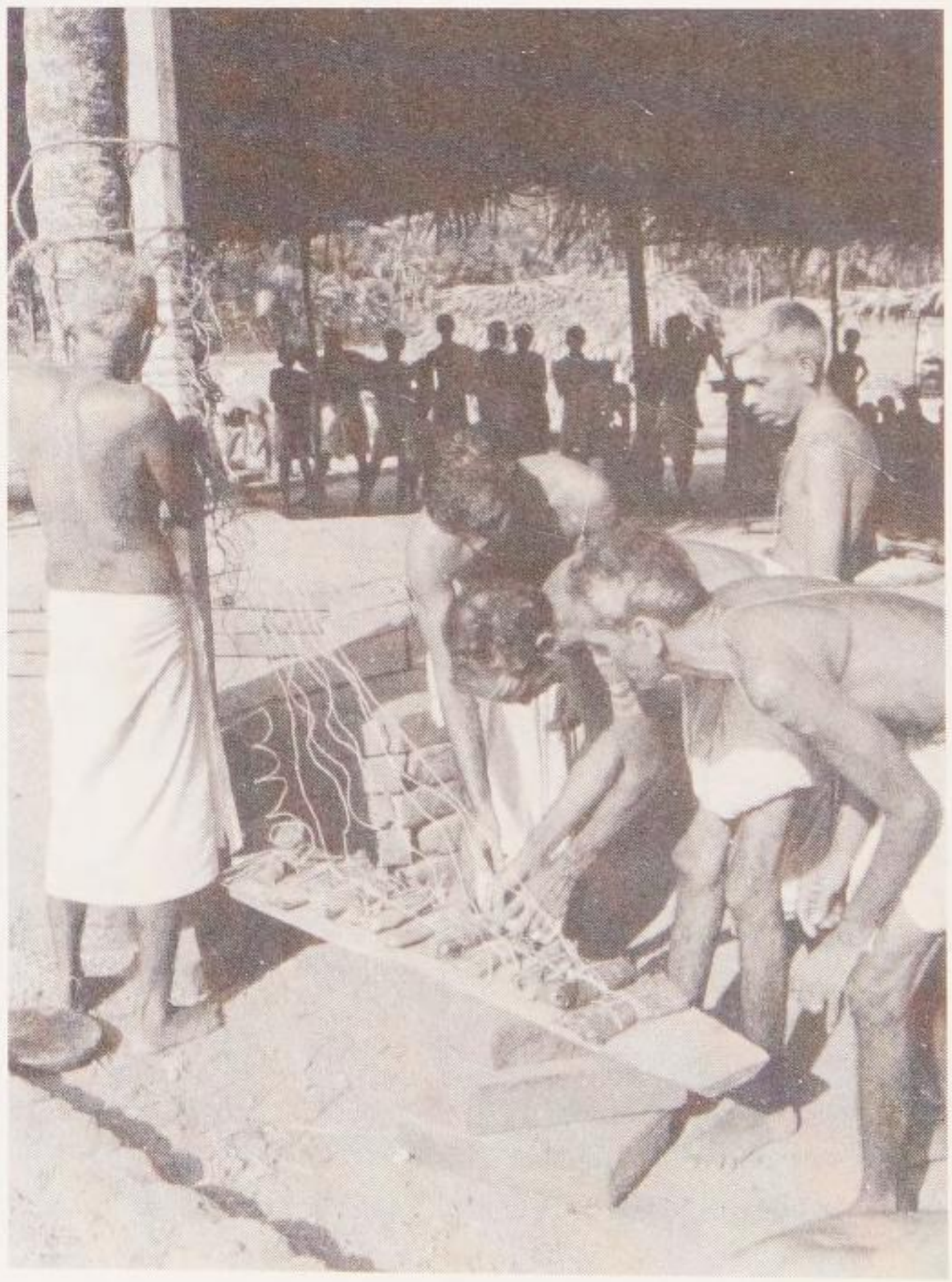

Plate 108. Kerala. "Animal" sacrifice of a Vedic agniṣṭoma. P. 318 (Frits Staal)

PART TWO

The Symbol Splintered

A name, a form, a substance: such are the touchstones for the analysis of a unique symbol as unspectacular as one could conceive, yet as complex as a mythologist could dream of. It hasn't yet been said, but the three-stranded cord that has served as our connective thread evokes the "names and forms" that the Upaniṣads oppose to their raw substance, which alone is real. To be sure, it is not a question here of affirming that the "substance" is more real than its concrete realizations. But the fact that the study of the symbolism of the ensemble could be organized according to this schema might indicate that it has remained very close to its first elaboration: the name has significance, so does the form, and the substance is of no less importance. These are the three elements to which Hindus attach their knowledge of the things of this world. Let us keep the same framework to analyze the dispersal of these symbolic elements. The three strands that were found reunited in an exceptional manner in Pōtu Rāju go on to unravel and take on diverse fortunes throughout all of south India, though not without sometimes evoking rapports that they maintain elsewhere. Another organization of the facts would have been conceivable: the geographical differentiation, notably according to linguistic areas, is apparent. The calendar of festivals could also provide a framework. But the choice adopted here will have the advantage of regrouping the different ways in which Vijayā-daśamī is celebrated in one chapter. In any case, the unfolding of the symbols remains our primary objective, and the order here proposed appears to serve that purpose best.

The links with the little god of Āndhra are sometimes so flagrant, so indispensable, that we will be tempted to explain the facts as so many *disjecta membra* of Pōtu Rāju—a geographical diffusion governing a certain dispersion, indeed loss, of meaning. It would certainly be difficult to suppose that the parts preexisted the whole. But such an hypothesis would be too simple, even if it is partly true: one will also see that as the evidence accumulates, the link with the primary source of inspiration, with the learned culture of the Brahmans, remains, and that this vertical relation accounts for the reinterpretation of the form, function, and different uses of the substance, while the symbol remains alive. The two modes of explication, far from being mutually exclusive, may on the contrary help us to understand the persistence and ubiquity of the one symbolism. It is only in the interior of Tamilnadu that the main "heritage" of Pōtu Rāju continues to be exclusively connected with the cult of the goddess, but less immediately with the buffalo sacrifice. In the western part of the Deccan. the situation is more varied.[1]

[1]I have left Kerala completely aside. The impossibility of entering the temple and the refusal by the Brahman priests in charge to communicate made the inquiry more aleatory than elsewhere.

I. Pōtta Rājā

In Tamil,[1] *pōttu* still means the "male" of an animal, but no longer particularly the male buffalo (the Tamil word for which is *erumai* or *erumāṭu*). *Pōtturājā* or *Pōtturāsā,* like *Pōttarājā* or *Pōttarāsā,* is no more than the Tamil transcription of the Telugu Pōtu Rāju.[2] As the people of Āndhra themselves no longer recognize in Pōtu Rāju the "buffalo king," one is not surprised that the Tamil Pōtta Rājā no longer has any connection with the buffalo, nor with the buffalo sacrifice. This association even seems to be excluded, since Pōtta Rājā is connected with the cult of Draupadī (Tamil: Tiraupati Amman̲), the *Mahābhārata* heroine who has became a goddess in the part of Tamilnadu adjoining Āndhra (mainly the districts of North Arcot and South Arcot). Draupadī temples have a double particularity that distances them from the buffalo sacrifice. First, the goddess is associated in her sanctuary with her five husbands and Kṛṣṇa, and, although Draupadī is obviously the principal deity, the temple generally bears the name of Dharmarājā, that is, Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest, most "yogic," and least "bellicose" of the five Pāṇḍavas. Second, her temples are almost exclusively[3] temples of the Vanniyar caste, a theoretically low caste but one that has pretensions to Kṣatriya status (in a region entirely without that varṇa, it is said). This adoption of Draupadī by the Vanniyars is not fortuitous. They interpret their name as derived from Sanskrit *vahni,* "fire," and claim to be *agnikulakṣatriya*s, that is, Kṣatriyas in the line of Agni, the (sacrificial) fire.[4] Draupadī is the sister of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the incarnation of Agni himself, and both are born of the sacrifice performed by their father Drupada. Pōtta Rājā is so thoroughly associated with Draupadī that his myth is told in the *Draupadīmāhātmya* (according to an account by a narrator from the Reddi caste that I

[1]Neither the Marātha Pot-rāj, nor the Pōte-rāja of Karṇāṭaka will be discussed here, since they were mentioned in connection with Pōtu Rāju.

[2]In Tamil, *pōtturāsā* also signifies "an indolent person." But *pōttarasar* is a title of the Pallava kings and is no doubt a Tamil translation of the meaning of their Sanskrit name: *pallava* means "young shoot," which is one of the meanings of the Tamil *pōttu*. Cf. *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 2962.

[3]One will observe an important exception (p. 108 below).

[4]As already noted, and as will be noted again, the śamī is in Tamil the vanni̲maram, which is interpreted as "fire-tree" on the basis of the same etymology.

recorded at the 1974 festival of the Pondicherry Draupadī temple). Its interest lies in showing the tenuous link that subsists with the small wooden post, Pōtta Rājā's Telugu homonym.

Once while Śiva was sleeping in the forest, Pārvatī took a piece of wood and designed a kōlam on the ground.[5] She placed a fort, a king, Brahmans, Śūdras, and so on in this kōlam. Śiva awoke at the moment she was giving it the final touches, and asked what she had just done. Pārvatī had not slept, but had traced the plan of a city. Śiva gives life to this capital which becomes Śivānandapurī. Its fifth king is Pōrliṅgam (Tamil *pōr* = "combat," "war"), who obtains the name Pōtta Rājā in battle after vanquishing fifty-six kings. After the Bhārata war, Kṛṣṇa decides to make Dharmarājā king of the entire world. Dharmarājā asks his brother Bhīma not to go where Pōrliṅgam dwells, but Bhīma doesn't listen, and, having arrived at Pōrliṅgam's capital, he places his wooden club against a wall, which immediately collapses. When Pārvatī had traced the kōlam with a piece of wood, Śiva had foretold that the city would be destroyed by a weapon made of wood, and such is Bhīma's club.[6] Pōrliṅgam comes immediately to attack Bhīma, and since he has received a boon from Śiva of five objects that make him invincible (a box of tumeric powder, a spear with five prongs, etc.), he is able to take Bhīma prisoner. Kṛṣṇa, who is omniscient, is aware of what has taken place. He transforms Arjuna into a woman (an echo of Arjuna's eunuch disguise in the MBh) whose mother he becomes himself. They present themselves weeping before Pōtta Rājā, the "mother" seeking to reclaim her "daughter's" husband whom Pōrliṅgam holds in prison. The king refuses to return Bhīma, but allows the two women to remain with him. On a festival day, the mother says she must return home to get the objects she needs to perform a rite. Pōtta Rājā asks what these objects are. She enumerates the five gifts of Śiva. Without suspicion (the buffalo is considered to be an oaf, the "indolent" creature connoted by its name), Pōtta Rājā lends her the required objects and, taking advantage of the situation, the two women return home, thus robbing the king of what has constituted his strength. Seeing that the women do not return, Pōtta Rājā questions Bhīma to learn who he is and where he comes from. Bhīma keeps silent. Fighting resumes and this time Bhīma is triumphant and can return to Hāstinapura, the Pāṇḍava capital. Pōtta Rājā sets out in search of the five talismans. One day he sees the two women and Bhīma pass by and claims his due. The mother proposes that he remain with them, to which he agrees, but on condition of marrying her daughter. The two "women" then reveal their identities, but that doesn't matter. Kṛṣṇa has a daughter born of Śaṅkhā ("Conch") named Śaṅkhavatī, whom he gives in marriage to Pōtta Rājā. In return, Pōtta Rājā will be their dvārapāla, the guardian of their gate.

Pōtta Rājā is placed facing the door to Draupadī's sanctuary; he is a warrior, represented in bas-relief on an upright stone slab. His right hand holds a weapon identical to that which is used in animal sacrifices in Tamilnadu (*arivāḷ,* a kind of billhook), and his

[5]The kōlam, elsewhere called *alpona* or *raṅgoli* (Sanskrit *raṅgāvalī*), is the more or less complicated diagram generally drawn in a continuous line in front of the door of houses each morning, generally with colored powders. It is not without interest for the rest of the story to note that not long ago a conch was still often buried at the center of this diagram in such a way as to show on the surface of the ground.

[6]The club is one of the iconographic symbols of the sacrificial post.

left bears a severed human head: the hundredth head of the demon Asiloma. Draupadī, fighting this hundred-headed demon, had cut off the first ninety-nine when a voice warned her that she would die should the hundredth head fall to the ground (echoing an episode in the MBh). The goddess asked Pōtta Rājā to hold it and prevent it from touching the ground.[7]

The annual Pondicherry Draupadī festival (July-August), which in principle lasts eighteen days, reproduces certain episodes from the MBh, according to the Tamil version by Villiputtūrār. It is less a question of ritual than of a production in which street theater alternates with temple ceremonies. The action is recounted by a narrator who elaborates on the Tamil *Bāratam*. The interest in the festival and its actual length vary greatly according to place and local resources, but it regularly ends with a firewalk. The festival I speak of here was observed in 1974 at the Pondicherry Dharmarājā temple. I will retain only points at which Pōtta Rājā plays a particular role (he is obviously present at everything that takes place in the temple). Late in the evening of the fifth day prior to the firewalk, the bow of Śiva that has been brought from the Himālayas to the land of the Pāñcālas is set up for Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*,[8] which will take place the next day. However, prior to this, in the course of a ceremony, preliminary observances are begun by devotees who on the final day will walk on fire in fulfillment of a vow they have made. Those who will undertake these observances go in procession to a tank enclosed by walls, accompanied by the painted wooden processional statue of Pōtta Rājā. On a platform at the edge of the tank are planted a pipal and a neem, which I was told represent Pōtta Rājā. At the foot of the trees is a row of nāgakkal (*nākakkal*), stone sculptures of snakes arranged in the form of a caduceus. To the left of the enclosure's entrance, a modest shrine to Nāgakanni (Nākakanni) is guarded by a statue of Kāttavarāyaṉ. It is to this shrine, which apparently plays no role, that the procession has come for the ceremony that now takes place in front of it. The portable wooden statue—*utsavamūrti*—of Pōtta Rājā is placed here, its back turned to Kāttavarāyaṉ. A whip of the customary form, thicker at one end than the other, is wound once around Pōtta Rājā's body from top to bottom. Draupadī's karagam (*karakam*) is prepared: represented by a metal pot filled with water, it is placed in the middle of a light wickerwork receptacle that is decorated with flower garlands and lemons until the pot cannot be seen. All this is placed on a stool in front of Pōtta Rājā. Meanwhile, those who will walk on fire (who are from different castes) do their ablutions in the tank and decorate their foreheads with the Viṣṇuite *nāmam*, calling out repeatedly with the cry "Govinda" (one of the most popular names for Kṛṣṇa). The oldest son of the officiating priest (a Vanniyar)—who, like his father, is entitled to bear the goddess's karagam on his head—clothes himself in a saffron dhoti and smears his naked torso with sandal paste. Red and white garlands are placed around his neck and across his chest:

[7]In reality, notwithstanding the myth, Pōtta Rājā often holds a kind of sword in his right hand and a small four-legged animal that often cannot be identified in his left. This animal, again represented on painted wooden processional statues of Pōtta Rājā, sometimes resembles a lion. Cf. plates 39 and 40.

[8]Drupada is king of the Pāñcālas and Draupadī is a Pāñcālī. The svayaṃvara is the ceremony in which a princess "chooses" a husband, but in the course of a contest in which she must necessarily reward the winner by giving him her hand.

insignia of the victorious warrior. Flower bracelets are put on his wrists. Assistants place offerings of coconuts, bananas, and flour lamps in front of the karagam.

Up to now, preparations have concerned the svayaṃvara and the marriage of Draupadī. The karagam evokes the bride's finery on her wedding day, and its bearer probably represents Arjuna, who will win the contest and obtain her hand. But to marry Draupadī means to take upon oneself a bloody war in which Kṣatriyas will be sacrificed on the battlefield. It is also at this moment that the officiating priest puts a saffron-colored thread around the wrists of the participants. Two of them are then given special treatment: those who on the festival's final day will assume the role of Draupadī's sons, who are killed in the slaughter of the Pāṇḍava camp. This is the supreme sacrifice required of the princess as the price of victory. Taking turns, the two kneel before the karagam, arms raised and hands joined above their heads. The officiating priest then takes up the whip carried by Pōtta Rājā, and after whirling it several times in the air, slashes the wrists of the two designated "victims" one time each. This is the real sacrifice, and the scene on the concluding day will only be a representation. In the procession back to the temple, the karagam is escorted by Pōtta Rājā and the five-pronged spear called *kontam* (the five Pāṇḍavas? the five sacrificial fires?).

The whip carried by Pōtta Rājā is a striking replica of the whip of the possessed Pōtu Rāju and the Marāṭha Pot-rāj, with which they scourge themselves during processions. Like the subsequent firewalk, the flagellation of the participants here is a new variant of symbolic "human sacrifice." Does this rite not reinforce the hypothesis that the whip is reminiscent of the grass rope that fetters the Vedic victim and the grass belt of the yūpa, to which the animal's rope could be attached? The movement of winding the whip around the wooden statue recalls the way in which the paśu was fettered (above, p. 44), while its extremities of unequal size call to mind the belt that one puts around the yūpa at mid-height (ibid.). In other words, while Pōtta Rājā no longer has any link with the buffalo and its sacrifice, he remains something of the victim and of the yūpa that represents the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra. This relationship is confirmed by the unexpected identification with Pōtta Rājā of the pipal and the neem at the edge of the tank. Not long ago, a goat was immolated there at the end of the festival, outside the temple precincts. Today, one only brings him a meal of cooked meat purchased at the market.[9] Pōtta Rājā will be present for the final day during the carnage in the Pāṇḍava camp, but will play no particular role.

Three days after the consecration of the participants the episode of the cattle raid is performed, in which Arjuna gains victory alone over all the main Kaurava warriors and returns the cows to King Virāṭa. But prior to this spectacular part of the ceremony, in which a few cows are driven into the street, a section of the *Virāṭaparvan* is narrated. This is the story of the arrival of the five Pāṇḍavas at the court of Virāṭa, king of the

[9]This trait would speak in favor of the distinctions suggested among the recipients of animal sacrifices on the occasion of the buffalo sacrifice. It appears that one must consider that at least some, if not all, of the goats are offered to Pōtu Rāju rather than to the goddess. As in the case when several buffalo are to be sacrificed and only the first is from the collectivity, the others being simply votive and individual, there is perhaps also the obligatory goat sacrifice to Pōtu Rāju, followed by an indeterminate number of votive offerings whose recipients are difficult to ascertain.

Matsyas, in disguises that will keep them incognito. Before entering the city, they had placed their weapons in a śamī tree[10] to protect them, and now that Arjuna wants to confront the Kauravas to retrieve the cows, he first goes to seek his weapon in the śamī, which he worships by a pradakṣiṇā. This narration does not take place in the Draupadī temple. A canopy of decorated cloth has been erected at quite a distance from the temple toward the outskirts of the town, and beneath the canopy presides the wooden Pōtta Rājā. The narrator first recounts the episode of the śamī. A chariot (presumably a war chariot) bears Arjuna, who is crowned with garlands and armed with bow and arrow. It stops in front of the canopy facing Pōtta Rājā, who receives offerings of chickpeas and bananas (while the narrator receives coins—"the śamī is of gold"—which he returns in the form of yellow turmeric powder). Then he recites the Pāṇḍavas' arrival at Virāṭa's court, with the story of Kīcaka. At this point the officiating priest arrives and performs a pūjā to Pōtta Rājā, frenetically accompanied by drums and trumpets. Disorder increases among the crowd, which pushes forward when the turmeric powder is distributed as prasāda. Two firecrackers explode. It is then that the animals are driven into the street, followed by Arjuna's chariot as a sign of his victory. When I ask why Pōtta Rājā receives special worship on this day, I am told that he presides over all auspicious events.

How, in fact, could one not link the worship of Pōtta Rājā to the śamī that frames the entire recitation and effectively contributes, on the level of myth, to the announcement of the final victory of the great battle? In one place he keeps his links with the yūpa, in another with the śamī. The symbolism retreats: it is not immediately decipherable, and one would face serious difficulty in understanding the two ritual functions of Pōtta Rājā that were just described without the prior analysis of Pōtu Rāju.[11] Yet the problem arises as to how the Draupadī cult annexes Pōtta Rājā, and how the goddess has chosen the latter as exclusive guardian. Is it pure contingency? Pure geographic proximity? Or was the symbolism of Pōtu Rāju still sufficiently determinant to play a role in this choice? The fact that the Vanniyars have Draupadī as a caste deity does not suffice to say yes to the last question. Yet the link between Draupadī and Agni could be a decisive mediation. For there is a temple in North Arcot District very near the Āndhra border that provides this missing link in an unanticipated manner.[12] And it is all the more valuable since it associates the transmission of Pōtu Rāju's name with that of the form of his post.

[10]Above, p. 55, n. 49.

[11]It was unfortunately not possible given the circumstances at the firewalk (immense crowd, dusk) for me to observe whether Pōtta Rājā was somewhere on the chariot bearing Draupadī, who presided over the ceremony. Let me simply say that it would be logical. Firewalking in Tamilnadu is one of the most frequent substitutes for human sacrifice (cf. above, p. 72 and n. 25). It is not specifically connected with the Draupadī cult. Cf. below, pp. 275 ff.

[12]It is quite evident that what I present here as an exceptional case is perhaps not one. Even though one travels the length and breadth of the Tamil countryside scrutinizing the landscape, one must nevertheless let some of the existing documentation escape. All pages relating to Draupadī were written prior to the much vaster field study undertaken by A. Hiltebeitel. I therefore refer to that work (1988, 1991). There are many more Draupadī temples than I had imagined. On the other hand, the stone post standing guard in front of Māriyamman or another such goddess is also more widespread, as I was subsequently to discover.

II. The Post

A. Draupadī with Two Posts

The Draupadī temple in Kūttampākkam (North Arcot Dt., Vāniyampāḍi Tk.) is in many respects exceptional. First, because it is not in the hands of Vanniyars; then because it appears to assume the role of a boundary temple; and finally, because Veḷḷāḷa Mudaliyārs are dominant there. The temple was formerly the property of Mudaliyārs—the priest in charge is himself one—and lands were attached to its cult. The temple is now under government control. In Tamilnadu, the term *grāmadevatā* designates any deity having a recognized place in the village. But the boundary goddess is known there to be the recipient of at least goat sacrifices. In Kūttampākkam, Draupadī never receives animal sacrifice; yet not long ago a goat was offered on the fourteenth day of the festival, corresponding to the first day of battle, to Arāvāṉ (Skt. Irāvat or Irāvāṉ in the nominative), the nāga son of Arjuna who sacrificed himself at the beginning of the war to ensure the victory of his fathers. Today, the goat has been replaced by a variety of pumpkin. Apart from daily worship, nothing takes place at the temple during the year—except an *āyudhapūjā* at the time of Vijayādaśamī. This amounts to a minimal activity in Tamilnadu, where the pūjā "to the weapons" is also a domestic cult. The annual festival, which must take place during the hot months (from the end of May to the beginning of August), lasts twenty days, as the customary eighteen days are extended by a nineteenth consisting of funeral rites for those who died in the war, and a twentieth for the coronation of Dharmarājā. From our point of view, however, the ritual is perhaps not the most interesting feature of this temple.

The structure is unpretentious and badly maintained, its sanctuary fronted by a maṇḍapa with a corrugated sheet metal roof. Nonetheless, although far from grand, this maṇḍapa contains treasures. Entering it toward the sanctuary (which opens to the east), one sees a stone post that initially appears to be a more ornate variant of a wooden Pōtu Rāju: square socle, square base with four engraved sides, but the thickness of the encrusted oil covering them renders them nearly unrecognizable; octagonal shaft, square ring, and a rounded knob on top. This post, according to my Mudaliyār informant (a Ceṅkunta Mudaliyār weaver) is Pōtta Rājā (plate 41). Very near this stone post, but toward the sanctuary and also exactly on the temple's main axis, is a thin wooden post

more than two meters high; set in a square socle with five steps, the wooden post is itself octagonal and ends in an elongated wooden tenon above an octagonal double ring in which one may recognize the form of the inwardly curved caṣāla. Near the base, approximately twenty and fifty centimeters above the socle, are also two narrow sculpted rings that could be a recollection of the grass belt around the yūpa.[1] This post is called Agniskambha (*Akkiṉikampam*), the "post of Agni," or better, the "Agni post." Although the Mudaliyār said that the MBh by Vyāsa, that is, the classical Sanskrit MBh, is recited during the festival, he gave me a somewhat surprising, but very instructive, local version: Agniskambha is born at the same time as Draupadī; she held him by the hand as she emerged from the sacrificial fire (*yāga,* a term reserved for āgamic temple sacrifices) that her father had performed in order to obtain a son able to slay Droṇācārya and a girl intended for Arjuna. Agniskambha is, therefore, Draupadī's brother. Pōtta Rājā, for his part, is a brother-in-law of the Pāṇḍavas. One knows that Pāṇḍu died while uniting with his wife Mādrī. His seed fell into a conch, from which a girl was born, Śaṅkhavatī, sister of the Pāṇḍavas and wife of Pōtta Rājā. The latter (and not Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna as in the classical MBh) is the commanding general of the Pāṇḍava armies. Like the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, he has a wooden utsavamūrti that is kept within the temple.

When the festival begins, a flagstaff with the emblem of Dharmarājā is erected in front of the temple, outside the maṇḍapa: this is the traditional dhvajastambha. The Agniskambha receives a cord of darbha grass, wound around it from top to bottom. A yellow thread (dyed with turmeric) is then tied to the wrists of the priest, Draupadī, the musician, and the gaṇācārya (*kaṇācāri*)—a personage whom I eventually understood to represent the commanding general of the Pāṇḍava armies, and who is therefore a human double of Pōtta Rājā. The *kaṅkaṇam*—the name of the protective thread—is also tied on the Agniskambha. The gaṇācārya does not appear to play an important role until the eighteenth day at the firewalk: it is he who leads the march across the coals carrying Draupadī's utsavamūrti. He must also perform the funeral rites on the next day. As to the utsavamūrti of Pōtta Rājā, it is taken into the maṇḍapa only on the day when the narration of the war begins. There is, therefore, a division of ritual roles between the wooden statue of Pōtta Rājā and his human counterpart. In comparison with Pōtu Rāju, Pōtta Rājā is clearly ennobled, but his wife has a scarcely veiled asuric ancestry,[2] which does not suffice to make him inferior. It is obviously not without interest, from the point of view of the development of the symbols, that Pōtta Rājā would be the substitute for the epical Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna, whereas his spouse is born from an aquatic womb.[3]

It would almost be possible, by way of commentary, to limit oneself to reproducing verbatim the version of the same facts that a neighboring Brahman, apparently a stranger to the temple, was anxious to relate. It was as if, rather than attempting to account for

[1]It is made in *vēppālai* (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*), a tree with white flowers and light-colored wood.

[2]One recalls Krsna's relationship to the Conch, personified as the asura Pañcajana, whom he goes to vanquish at the bottom of the sea (Mbh 7.11.19-20 [10.19-20]) and thereby acquires the conch Pāñcajanya (cf. HV 2.33.16-17 [79.15-16]). There are indeed other mythical Śaṅkhas in which the symbolism of the womb and of the cosmos to be born is more or less transparent.

[3]We find the same complementarity between Krsna's Conch and his Cakra in MBh 7.11.20-21 (10.20-21).

the facts as they presented themselves, he referred himself to a norm known to him, but without citing the sources. According to him, the true dhvajastambha, the one to which one must fix the embossed emblem of the *murusu* drum, is the wooden post under the maṇḍapa that, moreover, was placed there mistakenly between Pōtta Rājā and the sanctuary, whereas it should have been the reverse—that is, Pōtta Rājā should have been between the post and sanctuary. But he had more to say about this post—which did not seem to him to contradict its being the true dhvajastambha. It is, he claimed, a *yūpastambha* (a curious and somewhat redundant compound). Its socle with five steps is the yāgaśālā, that is, the hall in which oblations are made into the fire during a temple festival—which implicitly confirms the symbolism usually attributed to the numbers three and five when it is a question of elements reminiscent of the schema of Vedic sacrifice: both numbers allude to the number of fires in the solemn sacrifice.[4] Moreover—and here we strain our ears—this post represents the goat that should be there, which should be tied to the post, as the spiral of darbha grass indicates. According to the same Brahman, the wooden post represents both the yūpa and the victim, even though the people who visit the temple identify it with Agni. We are once again very near to Pōtu Rāju, but never has his symbolism been so clearly expressed. It was also the Brahman who stated (see above) that Pōtta Rājā's utsavamūrti was taken into the maṇḍapa on the first day of the narration of the war, in which he plays the role of the commanding general. Yet perhaps he goes a little too far when he wants to find Pōtta Rājā an ancestor in the classical MBh named Kālaprṣṭha (the latter is really a Nāga who only intervenes in the secondary myth of Śiva's victory over Tripura, and plays no role in the great battle).

We thus have here a doubling of the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra. On the one hand, there is a stone post of analogous form that will follow a separate career, this time like a faithful lithic copy of Pōtu Rāju, but without retaining the same material or bearing the god's name (according to the Brahman, though not the Mudaliyār). The Brahman thus gives a complete reinterpretation of Pōtu Rāju, whose role as substitute for Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna in the war preserves his function in front of the grāmadevatā.[5] On the

[4]When they are three, they are the three principal fires: gārhapatya, āhavanīya, and dakṣina. If they are five, one adds two secondary fires, sabhya and āvasathya; this is then what is called the pañcāgni.

[5]Another example of this type of post in front of Draupadī was brought to my attention by A. Hiltebeitel of The George Washington University (Washington, D.C.), who also provided a photograph and related information. In front of the Draupadī temple at Tindivanam (South Arcot Dt.), outside the edifice, is a pair of stone posts, the largest of which is on the axis of the sanctuary (which faces east) and the smaller a bit to its south. Their square section is reminiscent of the Pōtta Rājā in Kūttampākkam, but they are atypical. The largest is noteworthy for the clear indication of the inward curvature of the part corresponding to the caṣāla below the upper knob. But the priest in charge at the temple denies any relationship between the temple and these posts, which, he says, are only *ellaikkal*, boundary stones (of the village?). The function of the smaller of the two is undefined: a second one as a votive offering? But then the boundary is a divinity and/or linked to a divinity, which the reliefs decorating each side would confirm. Or again: is it a kind of balipīṭha for the main post? Or yet again, one returns to the idea that a divinity is involved, but the form of the smaller post does not induce one to see in it a balipīṭha, which would be flat at the top. On the other hand, the identification of the reliefs by the priest do not seem to be very certain. He wants to see a Āñjaneya (Hanumān) on the east face of the large post, whereas it is more likely a virāṉ of the prevalent type. To its left (facing north), he identifies a Kāttavarāyaṉ, very unusual near Draupadī. The Āñjaneya on the southern

other hand, there is a wooden post, again of similar form, for which the name of Agni explains the symbolism of the socle, the name and the socle distributing the functions vested in the śamī as the material of Pōtu Rāju; a post in which a Brahman formally recognized a yūpa and its victim. The association of the post and the victim, moreover, only translates the idea that the yūpa has no purpose if there is no victim, and that conversely, the victim is designated as such by the cord of grass that binds it to the post.

The Brahman's interpretation extends to the firewalk. Draupadī, carried by the gaṇācārya, is the first to cross the glowing embers, leading the wives of the dead warriors to the funeral pyre. But she alone comes out alive, not because her husbands still live, but because she was born of the sacrificial fire. The affinity between the goddess and her traditional guardian could not be stated more clearly in the consciousness of an informant, and it is the reference to the epic that provokes the association.[6] From our point of view, in reality Draupadī crosses the fire of war, which is extinguished when the war ends. That is why, in the ritual, the commander of the armies is Pōtta Rājā and not Agni himself, this brother of the epic princess who must necessarily perish at the conclusion of the hostilities he incarnates.

B. The Torture Post and Its Avatars in Tamilnadu

1. The Post-"Demon"

It is not surprising to find in the coastal districts of Tamilnadu a stone post, a faithful replica of the Pōtu Rāju fashioned of wood, whose form is no more functional than that of its model.[7] Its section is generally round, some thirty centimeters in diameter, and its top (approximately seventy centimeters above the socle) is relatively rounded. At the base of the shaft, either facing the goddess or turned toward the exterior, is a bas-relief of a *vīraṉ,* a warrior sculpted in a pose similar to that of Pōtta Rājā: he walks (or runs,

face appears more probable morphologically (plate 42). The figures on the small post are not identified but would also appear to be of the vīraṉ type, except for the bhakta on the eastern face: that figure may represent the stone's donor. That the large post would be a boundary stone is entirely possible, apart from the fact that another of this type has not been found. More likely, Draupadī's sanctuary would be on the (at least theoretical) border of the locality, with its original relation to the post installed on its axis forgotten, whether voluntarily or not. In fact, Draupadī is usually not associated with a post, the only sacrifice with which she is explicitly related being that of the war, notably symbolized by the firewalk. This is no doubt why Pōtta Rājā has renounced the form of the post.

To conclude with these relatively atypical forms of the post, it remains to mention one that appears in front of the Ammacciyār temple in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, which could also be a boundary temple. The shaft is square, the socle consists of three steps outlined on one side, and vīras are represented on at least two sides (east and west), while on the north two nāgas are entwined, and a goddess (surely demonic) faces south (plate 43). The part corresponding to the casāla is also double, perhaps to suggest the curved shape, and has an octagonal section. Here the post does not seem to play any other role than that of the goddess's guardian vīraṉ, which establishes a link to the stone post we shall now consider.

[6]By way of "riposte," this could provoke reflections on Draupadī, the epic princess whom one calls the Goddess. Cf. Hiltebeitel 1980 and 1981.

[7]One speaks of a model concerning Pōta Rāju only insofar as, *for us,* it is seen as a principle of intelligibility, but without prejudging the way in which its essential elements are reproduced.

or dances?) with his right arm raised and holding a weapon in readiness to strike. Often his name is barely individualized: Ediraḍiyāṉ, Muṉṉaḍiyāṉ, "he who is in front." The vīraṉ can also be represented on a stone that stands independently of the post. The condition in which these posts are found, encrusted and black, testifies to the regular worship they receive, which they are offered at the same time that the goddess is worshipped before whom they stand guard.

This post, apart from the very particular exception we have seen where it is still called Pōtta Rājā, is rarely found in front of Draupadī. The name of the goddess may vary: Ellaiyammaṉ ("goddess of the boundary"), Cantaveḷiyammaṉ in Kañcipuram, Mēṟkattammaṉ ("goddess of the west") in Uttaramērūr, Ammacciyār in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, etc.[8] On the one hand, she always seems to be associated, at least theoretically, with the boundary of the locality; on the other hand, she is identified by those who know her myth with Reṇukā and with one or another of the popular versions of the latter's myth.

Reṇukā, already known in the MBh, is a princess, and thus a Kṣatriya, who married the Brahman Jamadagni, by whom she had (in the epic version) five sons: four authentic Brahmans, and the last, Paraśurāma, "Rāma with the axe," a Brahman warrior prepared to wield his axe to serve the cause of Brahmans. One day his virtuous mother allowed herself to be distracted for a moment from her wifely duties at the sight of a *gandharva* king playing in the water together with some nymphs, and felt a certain regret regarding her austere condition as the wife of a Brahman ascetic. Realizing this, Jamadagni ("Devouring Fire") became angry with her and induced Paraśurāma to behead her. In the classical version, Paraśurāma has his mother immediately resuscitated by his father. This decapitation followed by a resurrection is associated in the myth with the aggression committed against Jamadagni by King Arjuna Kārtavīrya, who covets Jamadagni's cow, symbol of Brahmanic power. To avenge the death of his mother, Paraśurāma not only slays Kārtavīrya, symbol of a kṣatra gone astray, but all the Kṣatriyas on earth. However, like any "ordained" destruction (Paraśurāma is an avatar of Viṣṇu), it is the first phase of the integral renewal of the afflicted kṣatra that will permit the regeneration of the Earth. The latter, in effect, can only disappear in the absence of Kṣatriyas to govern her, and this is what is symbolized by Reṇukā's decapitation. But she disappears only to find again a harmonious kṣatra, vowed to the protection of dharma (thus of Brahmans), and evidence of a new golden age: and this is signified by Reṇukā's resurrection.

This epic version of the myth underwent popular developments lending it a supplementary dimension, indeed, a "theology" of the structure of goddess worship as it inscribes itself on the terrain. While killing his mother, Paraśurāma decapitates at the same time a woman of low caste into whose arms his mother had thrown herself. Now Jamadagni leaves it for his son to resuscitate both women by collecting the parts of their bodies. But Rāma makes a mistake and reverses the heads, the practical effect of which is to deify the two women in the Tamil south, one of whom is of high caste, while the

[8]I set aside the case of Māriyammaṉ, who can eventually be preceded by such a post, but with a significant modification. Māriyammaṉ seems without exception, in every region of Tamilnadu where she is found, to be situated at the center of the village. She is thus opposed to the goddess of the boundary. However, she is also associated with the myth of Renukā, whose popular form lends itself to such an opposition. Cf. below.

other is worshipped by the lowest castes.[9] However, as will be seen shortly, this complementarity is susceptible to another use, in which our post is involved in more than one way. It serves to distinguish the goddess at the center of the village from the goddess(es) of the boundary.[10]

It was observed in Orissa that the Vedic yūpa was reutilized in a stylized form for the buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess. The same form of post is again found here, a little more remote from its source, but equally in front of the goddess. Moreover, this post, in one form or another, seems to be associated with a sacrifice, although the buffalo sacrifice is absent. Is this absence the result of historical evolution, or has the buffalo sacrifice always been rarer in Tamilnadu than to its north, but present in symbolic forms or diverse substitutes? We shall leave this question unanswered, although the reappearance of the sacrifice in the northwest of Tamilnadu, in the Kongu country near Karṇāṭaka (see below), would rather favor the second hypothesis. It is as if symbolic creativity were all the more active where the real sacrifice is absent.[11]

We shall first consider two examples of temples where the post is found in its simplest (we shall soon see in which sense to understand this term) form. The Cantaveḷiyamman̲ temple in Kañcipuram, Chingleput Dt., has in its main sanctum a complete effigy of the goddess, preceded by a bodiless head that alone receives worship. All informants, including the gurukkaḷ (*kurukkaḷ*) priest in charge, identify the goddess expressly with Reṇukā. The meaning of Cantaveḷiyamman̲'s name is not clear. Before her, outside the sanctuary, a Munnaḍiyān̲ is turned toward her at the base of his post and sheltered under a stone cupola (plates 47, 48). To the right of her sanctuary is a smaller

[9]Let us note that this inversion characteristic of local popular developments of the cult of the Goddess is a kind of transposition in a feminine register of the first inversion that, in the classical myth, marks the birth of Jamadagni, Rāma-with-the-axe's father. Jamadagni is born after the exchange, whether voluntary or not, of two ritual dishes intended respectively for his mother, herself a princess and wife of a Brahman, and his maternal grandmother, a princess who would have given birth to a pure Kṣatriya, but who, as a result of this intervention, comes to have the Kṣatriya Viśvāmitra as her son, one who, following long austerities, succeeds in making himself recognized as a Brahman. But he will always retain from his Kṣatriya origin the scent of a warrior. This already explains Jamadagni's excessive quickness to anger, even though his mother had asked that the effect of this inversion be deferred to her grandson—which would be Paraśurāma. The "confusion of varṇas" that preoccupies the upper castes (and the epic) becomes an exchange between the goddesses that makes it possible to establish a close link in a given place between goddesses of high and low caste, represented respectively by a head without a body and a body without head. It is this link that matters, and not the terms that are thereby related, for sometimes the head and at others the body represents the noble form. After all, hierarchy can be signified in another way, even if only in the cult, but it is a fact that the image for worship of a number of important goddesses is reduced to a head. Headless bodies are much rarer and seem to be curiously linked with a fertility ritual, as is the case for Bhūdevī at the Bālabrahmeśvara temple in Ālampur (Andhra Pradesh, Kurnool Dt.). They crouch with open legs and genitals clearly indicated. The head is replaced by an inverted lotus, above which the two raised arms hold a victory garland. However represented, sociologically differentiated, or distributed in village space, the dichotomy of the feminine pantheon expresses the impossibility, for the cult as for the myth of the DM, for example, of having one and the same deity assume the totality of tasks. This is also a faithful replica of the complementarity that divides the masculine pantheon in two. But one cannot forget the other fundamental duality: that of gods and goddesses.

[10]See below, pp. 155 ff. This opposition will appear between Māriyamman̲ and Ellaiyamman̲ or other Kālīs.

[11]This was already the initial postulate for the Vedic yūpa which, no longer functional in the solemn ritual, was thereby all the more the object of speculations and of symbolic reinterpretations.

replica for Pāpattiyamman that contains the same effigies fronted by a liṅga. The local legend understands Pāppatti as a contraction of Pārppatti, the feminine form of *pārppan*, Brahman: a blind Brahman couple is said to have come to the temple and there had a vision of the goddess. By way of thanks, they would have constructed this double of Cantaveḷiyamman's sanctuary. This does not account for the presence of the liṅga and the Nandin who stands watch over it, just as Munnaḍiyān watches over the neighboring goddess. To the left of Cantaveḷiyamman's sanctum a more modest structure is occupied by a Kāḷiyamman represented as Mahiṣamardinī. Behind her and in the open air there is an equestrian statue of Kāttavārāyan with his two legitimate consorts.

Although I will not say much here about Kāttavarāyan, a few landmarks can be established for later use. It is more than likely that one may see behind him the Arjuna Kārtavīrya of the classical myth of Paraśurāma and Reṇukā. The fact that he is on horseback immediately indicates his royal status. This Kṣatriya is known[12] to have been impressed when visiting Jamadagni's hermitage by the ease with which a Brahman, reputedly poor by definition, offered him and his troops such generous hospitality thanks to his cow Kāmadhenu (or Homadhenu)—this cow that is both the emblem of the Brahman and his power, the source of all wealth through the sacrifice that she makes possible (the oblations into the fire—*homa*—are made essentially with clarified butter), and the symbol of Brahmanical order on earth. Kārtavīrya covets the cow and kills Jamadagni, who had refused to surrender her to him. It is then that Paraśurāma decides to exterminate all the Kṣatriyas, beginning with the thousand-armed Kārtavīrya. Popular myths have entirely forgotten this link between Kārtavīrya—who would seem to have become Kāttavarāyan in Tamil—and Paraśurāma, and have remade his biography with bits and pieces, as was done for Pōtu Rāju and Pōtta Rājā. One piece, permanent and pertinent for the cult, always emerges: as we shall see, it is known that he made off with a Brahman woman to marry her after having slain her guardian. Would this Brahman woman not be the Pāppatti of the sanctuary symmetrical to the statue of Kāttavarāyan (elsewhere she has the name Āryāmālā, and is the daughter of a Brahman)? It is also tempting to recognize in her Jamadagni's cow, stolen by Kārtavīrya after he had killed her owner. That would be well worth Kāttavarāyan's torments. One may suspect it, since the story thus transposed is reminiscent of the story current in Karṇāṭaka to account for the buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess. In this second story, the Goddess has become a young Brahman woman and the buffalo is the low-caste buffalo-meat-eating husband who led her astray. To top it off, Arjuna Kārtavīrya's capital has been called Māhiṣmatī since the time of the epic, and the consonance of that name with the buffalo Mahiṣa could not have escaped either erudite or popular imaginations. Taken as a whole, the temple would thus offer in an ordered cultic space the transposition of a popular version of the Reṇukā myth.[13]

[12]See above, p. 113, n. 9.

[13]The small sanctuary of Kāḷiyamman as Mahiṣamardinī recalls the association of the Goddess with the battle against the Buffalo Demon and the assistance she had to ask of a form inferior to herself, Kālī, in accordance with the DM. We shall soon see its justification. As for Śiva, his presence is directly linked to the myth of Paraśurāma, for according to the purāṇic tradition it was from him that Paraśurāma (like Arjuna in the epic) obtained the necessary weapons.

This example helps one understand how a goddess can be taken as both a local caste goddess and as a guardian, not of a village, but of the four cardinal points around a village, which amounts to the same thing. The temple is in the hands of Vanniyars, who also provided the priests until 1972. The priest now in charge is a gurukkaḷ. According to the local myth, Pārvatī had assigned four goddesses to watch over the four cardinal points while she practiced tapas—that is, while she could not herself exercise these functions. Cantaveḷiyamman is the Vanniyars' goddess, Ponniyamman is that of the Cempatavars (river fishermen), Karukkiniḷ Amaruda-Amman (?) is the goddess of the Ceṅkunta Mudaliyārs (weavers), and Kāḷiyamman is that of the Ācāris. There are thus four temples to goddesses in the positions of *dikpālas*, protectresses of the cardinal points, who are at the same time linked with castes occupying different quarters of Kañcipuram (at least theoretically). The Cantaveḷi temple, the only one I visited, is clearly found outside the town. The four dikpālas could thus have a function very similar to that of the grāmadevatās in Āndhra (for example, Poleramma in Maṅgalagiri is presently in the midst of the weavers' quarter [above, p. 13]).

Daily worship includes two pūjās to Cantaveḷi and Munnaḍiyān, and a single one to the other deities. The first to be honored is Munnaḍiyān. The annual festival takes place in Āḍi (July-August) and formerly included votive offerings of goats and cocks. The Vanniyar executioner decapitated the victims in front of the door to the goddess; the heads were given to the priest (also a Vanniyar at that time), whereas the executioner was paid in cash. Animals are still offered; however, they are no longer immolated, but sold by the temple administrators to the profit of the temple: another sign of the goddess's promotion. For Navarātri, Cantaveḷiyamman's utsavamūrti (a seated effigy with four arms) is taken out in procession every evening, and a fire installed in the maṇḍapa receives a morning and evening homa. Each day a Vanniyar assumes responsibility for the costs of the worship. On the tenth day, according to the local myth, the goddess slew Mahiṣāsura who, during the combat, transformed himself into a vanni tree: she must therefore fell a *vannimaram,* that is, a śamī tree. As there is not a single śamī in the vicinity, a young banana tree is planted just outside the temple entrance, facing the utsavamūrti of the goddess who is in attendance at the ritual. The priest cuts the banana tree with a large straight-bladed knife, a *katti,* and the crowd rushes forward to take away its pieces. This is the first time mention has been made of the vannimaram in connection with the banana tree in the celebration of Vijayādaśamī. The banana tree is here only a substitute for the śamī, and is known to be employed normally as an auspicious sign (for example, at marriages). This version of the myth and the rite is interesting in that, in the absence of any buffalo sacrifice, it is known that the śamī, the fire-tree for the Tamils, is a form assumed by the buffalo demon in his fight with the Goddess. It is obviously a nonclassical variant, but one that closely follows the account in the DM (3.29 ff.), in which Mahiṣa assumes diverse forms to fight his adversary. We shall soon encounter other versions in which any reference to the buffalo demon will have disappeared. But even here one would find it difficult to understand this transformation of the buffalo into a vannimaram had we not already come to know the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra.

A pause—or detour—in the investigation centered on the post is perhaps at this point the occasion to advance our mythico-ritual approaches and to see the veracity of myth

and rite assert itself in the clear awareness of the actors. In Rāmanāthapuram, capital of the former kingdom of Ramnad (*Rāmanāṭu*) that includes Rāmeśvaram, an analogous version of the Vijayādaśamī myth is known. Mahiṣa, pursued by the Goddess, hid himself in a vannimaram, or indeed assumed its form. It is also toward a śamī (in fact, only an ordinary branch from an *Acacia arabica,* as far as I could see) that Rājarājeśvarī, tutelary goddess of the Ramnad kings, must aim an arrow on the night of the festival to celebrate her victory over the demon. This variant is not very current in the Tamil south. It is therefore legitimate to seek a connection between the rājas of Ramnad—whose version this is officially—and the Vanniyars of Kāñcī who, as all Vanniyars do, pretend to Kṣatriya status and would have it that as *agnikula-kṣatriyas* they belong to 'the lineage of Agni."[14] The Maravar rājas of Ramnad openly call themselves Kṣatriyas without attempting to prove it, having established a small kingdom with a great reputation in recent centuries. They would certainly be the last to forget their quite low, although warrior, origin, but their myths are applied to giving themselves titles of nobility: the only ones, in fact, to which they are entitled. For the Setupatis—"masters of the causeway" (between India and Sri Lanka)—reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is obligatory. Their ancestor, Guha, was precisely the boatman who took Rāma from one shore of the strait to the other. Seeing that his master did not return from Laṅkā, Guha wanted to commit suicide in the fire he had prepared for that purpose. Hanumān prevented him from doing so by promising Rāma's return. When the latter did return and heard what had transpired, he named Guha "Maravan," meaning at once both the Audacious and the Cruel.[15] This attempted etiology aside, let us retain the idea that the Maravars' eponymous hero draws his name from a relation to the fire in which he intended to sacrifice himself. He is as if reborn from the fire that was to have destroyed him.[16] From this fire to the vannimaram of Mahiṣa, the link is obviously neither conscious nor immediate. It is nonetheless remarkable that the two would be present in the foundation myths of the Maravars. The rapprochement with the Vanniyars invites one to see the implicit recognition of the inferiority of the devotee at the same time as his privileged proximity to Rāma, who is himself a worshipper of Śiva in the Rāmeśvaram temple. Unconsciously, the rāja of Ramnad—and no doubt all Maravars along with him—identifies his kingship with that of the Mahiṣāsura who becomes a vanni, as he founds that kingship in the fire in which his ancestor won his royal title. He is himself a devotee of Śiva, the master of Rāmeśvaram, but he does not hesitate to acknowledge that it was Śiva who enabled Mahiṣa, through his ill-considered boons, to defy the Goddess in battle. Elsewhere, kings more certain of their status make Mahiṣa into an avatāra of Śiva.

The Vanniyars' link to Mahiṣa, transformed into a vannimaram, is also unconscious, whereas their understanding proclaims their status as Agnikulakṣatriyas (one will recall that *vanni* in Tamil is understood as deriving from the Sanskrit *vahni,* a synonym of

[14]Cf. above, p. 103. Concerning their efforts in this direction, cf. Thurston 1909, vol. 6 s.v. Palli (another name for Vanniyars with wider geographic extension).

[15]Cf. Thurston 1909, vol. 5, p. 24 s.v. Maravan.

[16]We will soon meet with other elements that reinforce the hypothesis of a link between the Maravars and the fire and buffalo; below, pp. 236-37.

agni, "fire"). However, it is much more apparent in the worship they offer the goddess Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ,[17] one of the goddesses of eastern Tamilnadu where the temples are often in the hands of Vaṉṉiyars (or of castes having similar royal pretensions) (plate 44). She has as adversaries Agnivīra (*Akkiṉivīraṉ*) and his six brothers. But Agnivīra is the only one entitled to a little sanctuary facing her shrine, and is worshipped in his own right. He drinks alcohol, eats meat, and bears a very asuric side-chignon (plate 45). Against him and his brothers the goddess creates, or appeals to, her brother Viṣṇu, who creates seven *munis* (plate 46). Agnivīra eludes the massacre by promising the goddess to become her guardian and devotee. Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ is a form of Pārvatī and her temple always includes a subshrine perpendicular to her sanctuary and consecrated to an anthropomorphic Śiva named Maṉṉarcāmi. The annual temple festival, in Cittirai or Āḍi, culminates in a firewalk where all the goddess's devotees, distributed over a vast area, reunite. This festival is complex, but above all not very clear, since in certain cases[18] the goddess is completely absent from it, and is represented only by a decorated brass vessel that is carried by a Vaṉṉiyar priest to open the firewalk. The processional statues present are usually those of Subrahmaṇya (who also has a subshrine in the temple) and his two wives, flanked by a wood-fashioned Agnivīra as guardian. The fire for the firewalk is lit with the fire employed at Subrahmaṇya's marriage ceremony, which is celebrated in the brahmanic manner with homa and a high-caste priest, or with a fire made specially in front of Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ by the gurukkaḷ. Subrahmaṇya is Pārvatī's son, but his links with the fire and the buffalo are as close as they are complex. Whatever may be the myth of his birth, an explicitly sacrificial Agni is associated with it, and two epic versions of his story oppose him to the demon Mahiṣa.[19] According to the myth enacted in the local street theater (the Tamil text of which is published in Cuddalore), Agnivīra is the son of Śūrapadma, the main asura whom Tamil myth opposes to Subrahmaṇya. One moves from the god Agni to the demon Agnivīra, a passage facilitated by the company the latter keeps with the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra.[20] However, the most striking element is that in the procession that opens the firewalk, Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ's vessel is immediately followed by a perforated clay pot containing fire, the *agnikarakam* (plate 51), about which interpretations by informants at different temples are at variance. Sometimes it is Īśvara, that is, Śiva, which is not absurd since Śiva is present in a subordinate position in the temple, and since the śruti identifies Śiva, as destroyer, with the sacrificial fire. Sometimes it is the goddess's "śakti," which is more surprising since the goddess is herself Śakti, as is said in another of her temples. And sometimes it is simply Agni. But there is never a thought of identifying it with Agnivīra, who nevertheless plays his role as guardian throughout

[17]Cf. Biardeau 1967-68 for an initial discussion.

[18]Information on the annual festival was gathered in 1980, mainly at three temples: in Kaṉṉiyakōyil (South Arcot Dt., Cuddalore Tk.), Kuḍikkāḍu (ibid., Panruti Tk.), and Eḷumēḍu (ibid.). They are again considered below, pp. 275 ff.

[19]MBh 3.223 ff. (213 ff.) and 9.46 (45).

[20]Not to mention the ubiquity of Reṇukā and Arjuna Kārtavīrya in the region, from whom it is known that an Agni badly managed by the king can become destructive, catastrophic, and in other words asuric (cf. MBh 12.49 [idem]).

the festival. We are definitely outside the (mainly Kaṇṇaḍa) region where the Buffalo becomes the low caste husband of the Brahman goddess, or the (Telugu) area where he is her younger brother and guardian. In any case, the buffalo has entirely disappeared and its memory subsists only in Agni's transformation into the demon.

The Vanniyars questioned had no difficulty in recognizing that *vanni* and *agni* are synonymous and that the two words designate fire: it is the basis of their most fundamental claim. They are, however, deeply offended when the possibility is mentioned that they would have some manner of privileged rapport with Agnivīra. Yet when they make a vow, it is to Agnivīra that they offer a goat or cock (which, to please the Brahmans, is no longer put to death), since they are no more vegetarian than he. Moreover, at the time of their marriages the first supporting pillar of the canopy erected for the ceremony must be made of a vannimaram.[21] They no doubt consider it more glorious to be related to Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the brother of another of their goddesses, Draupadī, but they forget that Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who was born of a sacrifice closely bordering on black magic[22] performed by his father, had to disappear in the nocturnal massacre of the Pāṇḍava camp that concludes the epic battle. They forget so well that the ritual enactment of the massacre during the annual festival at Draupadī temples evokes only the death of Draupadī's sons, nephews of Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna on their mother's side. The latter, in the popular form of the epic myth, play the same role of substitute victims as the brothers of Agnivīra in the story of Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ. The Vanniyars' ancestor must in one way or another extricate himself, safe and sound, and ensure their link with the goddess.

Returning to the stone post, in Uttaramērūr (Chingleput Dt., Kancipuram Tk.), not far from Kāñcipuram, the temple of Mēṟkattammaṉ, or Māri Mēṟkattammaṉ, presents a situation very comparable to that of Cantavēḷiyammaṉ. According to the local myth, Mēṟkattammaṉ came from the west during a flood—an oft-repeated echo of the myth of the deluge that makes order emerge from chaos in a region were the sea is nearby but to the east. Varuṇa, regent of the west, is the Vedic god of water, sea, or river. Kṛṣṇa's capital Dvārakā, which is devoured by the ocean after the Kṛṣṇa's death (MBh 16.6.23-24 [7.16-17]), is in the extreme northwest of the Gujarat peninsula. The Mēṟkattammaṉ temple, located west of Uttaramērūr, belongs to a family of Kavarai Nāyuḍus (a merchant caste of Telugu origin) and the priest himself is a Nāyuḍu. The principal mūrti has four arms, in front of which is also a head identified as Reṇukā, the image that receives worship.[23] Standing guard in front of the goddess is a Munnaḍiyāṉ sculpted at the base of a stone post, but this time turned toward the east, like the goddess, rather than facing her (plates 49, 50). An evocative variation, the post's shaft is octagonal. All the local members of the caste, and also village notables, contribute to the temple's maintenance and cult. Contrary to his homonym at Kāñcipuram, this Munnaḍiyāṉ is worshipped every day after the goddess. During the annual festival, which is always held on the last Sunday of Āḍi (thus at the beginning of August), the goddess's procession goes through

[21]N. A. Stuart, *Manual of the North Arcot District,* quoted by Thurston 1909, vol. 6, p. 19.

[22]MBh I 167 (155).

[23]For an architectural and iconographical description of the temple, cf. F. Gros and R. Nagaswamy 1970, 45-47.

the four main streets of the village.[24] All the inhabitants participate. It is also an occasion to offer votive sacrifices of goats and cocks to Munnaḍiyāṉ: they are sacrificed in front of him, and this is perhaps the reason for his position relative to the goddess. She, like the caste, is vegetarian; only her bodyguard is a meat-eater. The executioner is again a Vanniyar or a representative of a very low caste. The head goes to the Nāyuḍu priest, who sells it: would the goddess have become vegetarian after having once been less so? A broken mūrti that has been placed at a distance from the sanctuary represents Mēṟkattammaṉ, seated and with four arms like the present goddess, but her left foot is placed on the head of a demon. The demon has disappeared from the new version of the effigy.[25]

For Vijayādaśamī, the utsavamūrti (seated and with four arms) exits under the *gopuram* at the entrance. In its presence, a young banana tree representing Mahiṣa is planted between the gopuram and Munnaḍiyāṉ, and the priest shoots an "arrow" from a fantasy bow, and then fells the tree with a curved blade (*arivāḷ*) of the type customarily used for animal sacrifices. Once again, Vijayādaśamī is associated with the goddess's victory over the buffalo demon with the latter represented by a young banana tree, though without mention of its transformation into a śamī. This celebration, as well as the location of the shrine on the western boundary of the settlement, helps to make the goddess a protectress of the village, a "grāmadevatā," or at least a guardian of the west in the manner that makes Cantavēḷiyammaṉ a dikpāla. There are, in fact, other boundary goddesses at other points (Mādariyammaṉ, Gaṅgaiyammaṉ, Nukkalammaṉ), but, like Cantavēḷi in Kāñcī, only Mēṟkattammaṉ has the stone post in front of her sanctuary. Around her temple, a Gaṅgaiyammaṉ and an Aṅkāḷammaṉ also have their places of worship, probably in the hands of lower castes. It is not possible to determine whether these temples once had buffalo sacrifices, but they retain at least the memory of the Goddess as slayer of the buffalo demon during Vijayādaśamī.[26] On the other hand, there is an ambiguity as regards the temple festival's local significance. Is it primarily the festival of an important caste that also attracts its clientele, or is it a village festival? The present state of the documentation does not allow an answer. It is finally the place of boundary goddesses in the organization of the pantheon and in the religious life of Tamilnadu that has not been sufficiently studied, or even analyzed as such.[27]

[24]I do not see what corresponds to these four streets on the plan given in Gros and Nagaswamy 1970. It would be tempting to see there the quadrilateral covered each year by the temple deity's chariot.

[25]Op. cit., p. 46.

[26]If I insist on this point, it is because the general situation in Tamilnadu is different, as will be seen later. Much farther to the south, at Taccanallūr in Tirunelveli Dt. (and Tk.), the Ekkāḷadēviyammaṉ temple also preserves the precise memory of the Goddess's victory over the buffalo, which it celebrates there not at Vijayādaśamī, but during the night of the eleventh to twelfth day: the goddess leaves the temple on a lion and goes north (the temple itself opens to the north) to a place situated very much outside the locality to slay the demon Makuḍa (= Mahiṣa) there, who is represented by a young banana tree planted in the earth and decorated with mango leaves. Following a pūjā to Makuḍa, the priest, a Kambar (a caste of musicians and priests at goddess temples in Tirunelveli), thrice aims an arrow with a miniature bow at the banana tree. He then cuts it and tosses it away. On the twelfth day, after the night of *saṃhāra* (putting to death, but also cosmic reabsorption), votive animal sacrifices are offered to Makuḍāsuraṉ on the very place of his slaying.

[27]Very roughly, and as a first general impression, I would be tempted to compare the very neat plan of Uttaramērūr and its peripheral goddesses protecting the *caturvedimaṅgala* of the center and its Viṣṇu

2. Māriyamman and the Impalement Stake

Until now, the characteristic role of the post, qua post, has scarcely been discernible except through the warrior who appears on its base and whose personality remains vague. It is thus that the Munnaḍiyān who appears before Cantavēḷiyamman in Kāñcīpuram does not seem to have any particular relationship with Kāttavarāyan, the villain of the myth. One knows only that the personage of the vīran—and Munnaḍiyān is unquestionably one of these—is always asuric, and that his position facing the goddess's sanctum presupposes bhakti, the relation of devotion that links the demon to a superior (at least relative to the demon) divinity. But is there such a distance between the ancient yūpa and this lithic copy (which has behind it no doubt several centuries, or indeed a full millennium if the post in Uttaramērūr is foundational)? Ever since its uses in Vedic ritual, the post has appeared as the very symbol of the supreme torture to which the animal victim is subjected when it is put to death. One knows that it was no longer functional and had no role in the killing even at the time when the solemn ritual was codified. That could only favor varied reinterpretations, perhaps successively or geographically differentiated. The impalement stake itself could have been one of these, and one knows that in Āndhra the impaling of victims (from the piglet to the egg and lemon) was current not so long ago.[28] Most of the time it was done on sharply pointed stakes set up on a cart. However, if one gives credence to Whitehead (1921, plate facing p. 39), the well-known post of Pōtu Rāju would itself have served as an impalement stake, and the actual Pōtu Rāju would have been a small conical stone placed just beside it.[29] Without denying Pōtu Rāju's possible rapport with impalement rituals, it is reasonable to doubt that his current representation would have been employed in that manner.

We shall, however, not attempt to prove that the functional impalement post that we now consider would derive directly from the Vedic post. Let us, as is customary, leave the problem of origin to its impenetrable obscurity and observe, this time before our very own eyes, the transformation of an inoffensive stone post into a veritable instrument of torture. The Tamil term *kaḻumaram* designates the impalement stake, and also the post that is set in the ground to provide the vertical axis for hook-swinging. The two examples we shall now consider have the advantage of marking the continuity from the post with the vīran—briefly, the "demon"-post—situated in front of some boundary goddesses, to the impalement stake and the hook-swinging post respectively. Both are to be found along the eastern coast of Tamilnadu.

temple—whose antiquity is attested (Gros and Nagaswamy 1970)—with the situation at Uḍupī in South Kanara (Karṇāṭaka), where the Krsna temple, flanked by two older Śiva temples and surrounded by eight Mādhva monasteries, is protected at the four cardinal points by four goddesses who are assisted in their task by an indeterminate number of *bhūta*s. We shall soon have occasion to again find a spatial organization of this type in Kongunad, inscribed on the terrain but perhaps without an historical relation with the real settlement.

[28]Cf. Whitehead 1921, 48 ff. In fact, at a period when the observation would no doubt still have been possible, no attempt was made to discern the relation between the different forms of sacrifice.

[29]For a similar Pōtu Rāju post, but of wood and too short in its actual form for the impalement of an animal, cf. above, p. 18.

a. Two Kaḷumarams: Puttūr and Nāgapaṭṭiṉam

In Puttūr (Tanjavur Dt., Sirkali Tk.), the temple of Cālaikkarai Māriyammaṉ is on the roadside, as her name indicates. Facing east, her outer courtyard has a kaḷumaram of a particular form. Here we find an unquestionable recollection of the stone post, but it seems to be adapted to the function signified by its name: the knob at the top is tapered, and the wood is covered with brass (plates 52, 53). More precisely, the square shaft is made of wood covered with brass; above it, a narrower cubical portion of the wood has been left uncovered; and above that, the metal ring and elongated knob are probably slipped over an entirely invisible tenon or other wooden form. Moreover, this post (fashioned of an unidentified wood), which is scarcely as high as the stone post, is raised upon a large cubical socle that is somewhat more than a meter high. On one side are two steps that enable a person to reach the level of the post. The brass on the kaḷumaram is surprisingly polished and shiny, although it stands unprotected in the open air. Otherwise there is no trace of worship: perhaps the polishing is equivalent here to an act of piety?

In the sanctum, a seated Māriyammaṉ with four arms is fronted on her right by a head of Reṇukā sheltered beneath a nāga's hood. A small subshrine dedicated to Pēcciyammaṉ, devourer of children, is found in the ardhamaṇḍapa, to the goddess's left, while on the same side but in the maṇḍapa near the front door are portable wooden statues of Kāttavarāyaṉ, his wives, his younger brother, and the bearer of his umbrella. Here Kāttavarāyaṉ is the son of Māriyammaṉ and the god Vāyu, a paternity that entitles him to Kṣatriya status.[30] At the same time, he is considered to be the avatāra of Murugaṉ (Murukaṉ, the Tamil name of Skanda-Subrahmaṇya), who, for his part, is held to be a Brahman. Kāttavarāyaṉ has two Brahman wives, one of whom he abducted, Āryāmālā, and another called Karuppāyi.[31] Thus although he is of "mixed" birth (like Viśvāmitra, who has a symmetrical correspondence with Paraśurāma; cf. above, p. 113, n. 9), Kāttavarāyaṉ has an elevated rank. At the time of the temple's festival, he formerly left at the head of the procession; now he is placed on the same chariot as the goddess's utsavamūrti, to her right (in the position of consort!). Nonetheless, the local myth recounts that the kaḷumaram commemorates his impalement: he was put to death for having abducted Āryāmālā. Unconsciously the myth approaches that of Kārtavīrya, the Kṣatriya who stole the Brahman Jamadagni's cow and killed him. Kāttavarāyaṉ's impalement is the sacrificial form taken by his death at the hand of Paraśurāma—in a cultic context where one also finds the head of Reṇukā (above, pp. 112-14).

The Māriyammaṉ temple is here, as everywhere else in Tamilnadu where the goddess is present, considered as the center of the settlement. The head of Reṇukā that fronts her four-armed effigy is not in this instance located immediately before her, and does not receive the diverse anointings and lustrations that would be offered to a worshipped image. Under the name of Ellaiyammaṉ, she retains her characteristic function as "goddess of the boundary," even if the worship she receives brings her spatially close

[30]Vāyu is also the father of Bhīma in the MBh, a Kṣatriya who possessed an extraordinary strength and a propensity to indiscriminately break everything.

[31]The temple also retains a (historical?) trace of a connection with Kerala. The non-Brahman wife is Malayāḷī and the younger brother has also come from a locality in Kerala, Toṭṭiyam.

to Māriyamman̲. This sacrificed head is strikingly opposed to the peaceful figure of Māriyamman̲, the Goddess, but through its position in the sanctum it only represents a duplication that in other cases opposes the boundary temple to the one at the center. It will henceforth be useful to be fully aware of this duality: the goddess at the boundary is more directly exposed to the sacrifice, that is, to the battle against the demonic adversary who has come from outside; she is the suffering and blood-soaked aspect of the Earth—both as warrior and victim—while the goddess at the center reigns victoriously. This situation assumes various forms that are essentially distributed according to geography, and no doubt by the same token according to the locally dominant castes—but without our being able to ever reconstruct their history.[32]

In Puttūr, Māriyamman̲ protects the locality with the assistance of Reṇukā (and her guardian Kāttavarāyan̲!), and every year her processional chariot makes a tour of the village. During the temple's festival that is held in Vaikāsi (May-June), on the ninth day there were formerly goat sacrifices (in reality, always small lambs) by impalement on the ka̲lumaram where Kāttavarāyan̲ once received his punishment: an old woman formally attested to having seen this. There is still a firewalk on the festival's tenth and final day. This schema corresponds to the autumnal Navarātri at which, in other parts of India, the buffalo is sacrificed in the night of the eighth to ninth day, the final day being that of the goddess's victory on which one or another form of "human sacrifice" may be practiced. But in Tamilnadu and Āndhra, the buffalo sacrifice never seems to have coincided with the autumnal Durgāpūjā. Incidentally, the Puttūr temple probably never had a buffalo sacrifice. No trace of it remains, either in rite or myth, and that seems to be the general situation of temples that are said to be "at the center." We shall return to this temple, which may have conserved a memory of the buffalo demon in a form that is still scarcely recognizable because we are yet to fully explore the symbols condensed in Pōtu Rāju, symbols that are present there in a dispersed and completely subliminal form.[33] For the moment, let us confine ourselves to noting the co-occurrence in one and the same sanctuary of a real torture post and a symbolic "human sacrifice."

One will recall that Orissa has already provided an example of this association (see above, p. 71 ff.) in a context where there were buffalo and goat sacrifices. There, the "human sacrifice"—atypical elsewhere in relation to our central symbolic context—probably had as its function only to recall, to make *real,* the profound verity of the sacrificial mechanism and its implicit transformation into a martial sacrifice. This verity is that the true victim is not the animal that is offered; it is the sacrificer. And in the sacrifice of battle, the sacrificer par excellence is the king (whom, in any case, we find in such a

[32]It is necessary to forgo the cartographic representation of this distribution because the information collected has been too limited. In addition, it appears nearly impossible to trace the precise boundaries of each transformation since continual fluctuations have no doubt occurred in the course of time. The hypothesis of variations due to changes in political power is plausible. See the case of Kongunad, discussed below. It is, however, clear now that the Kāverī valley and its delta have undergone a certain type of transformation that is different from what one finds on the east coast, as concerns us here, and that Ramnad underwent its own transformation and Kongunad yet another in a restricted area.

[33]This is obviously the drawback of the method of exposition that has been adopted here for logical reasons. The condensation of symbols in Āndhra led to a more monographic type of elaboration. Here their dispersion requires an inverse approach. Cf. below, p. 271.

role already in the solemn Vedic sacrifice). The "victim" of the sacrifice is thus a representative of the locally dominant caste, one of the numerous upholders of the royal function, and his torture introduces the dimension of renunciation into the sacrifice.

In the Puttūr temple, on the other hand, one has a sacrificial post that has again become functional. In this post, one recognizes the form of Pōtu Rāju, and a torture unrelated to it that, by way of the fire, is reminiscent of the original wooden raw material of the śamī tree. Functionally, the kaḷumaram has such associations on two accounts: first, because it was the instrument of Kāttavarāyaṉ's death; and second, because, until recently, young goats offered to Māriyammaṉ were impaled there. One could even risk seeing here a passage from the warlike battle between Paraśurāma and Arjuna Kārtavīrya, in which the latter perishes (by arrows rather than the axe), to the death by the stake that completes his life as it is transformed into that of Kāttavarāyaṉ. As for the firewalk,[34] it is quite evident that it transforms the wood of the śamī into the fire of war, evoking at the same time the fire at the end of the world. But for all that, it does not lose the first function of all ritual torture inflicted upon men, namely, to recall that the true victim of the sacrifice is always man, and preferably the king. At the same time, it should be noted that this association—apparently present only in the eastern part of Tamilnadu—implies that the kaḷumaram is at the center of the settlement, just as Māriyammaṉ is herself.[35] Now here, the goddess is spatially and ritually associated with Ellaiyammaṉ: same sanctum, same festival. And the same Reṇukā myth connects the two goddesses, reducing the duality to a simple iconographical dissociation.

We shall only mention here the Māriyammaṉ temple in Kāṭṭiṟuppu (Sirkali Tk.), a nearby locality passed en route. Here too the kaḷumaram is reduced to a stake covered with metal, and would appear to be functional, though without any particular form. The kaḷumaram is probably identified with Kāttavarāyaṉ, who plays the role of the goddess's guardian. The Paḍaiyāṭci (Vaṉṉiyar) priest offers him a cock (the animal is decapitated and not impaled) on the first day of the ten-day festival, which concludes with a fire-walk. The noteworthy feature of this site is that the kaḷumaram, raised on a brickwork socle and installed in front of the temple's maṇḍapa on its central axis, is in the shade of a beautiful margosa-pipal "couple." The two trees are relatively young and equally robust. One has here a kaḷumaram situated at the theoretical center that the Māriyammaṉ temple always represents, and that the margosa-pipal couple shelters. It thus evokes the Pōtu Rāju at the center of villages in Āndhra, although its specific form would have disappeared. The same locality has an Ellaipiḍāri on the southern boundary and an Aiyaṉār on the northern boundary. Further along in the same taluk we will also find a Māriyammaṉ temple with an impalement stake associated with the apparatus of a ceḍil (below, pp. 137-38), such as one finds along the Kāverī. Notwithstanding regional variations in form, the thematic continuity seems to be obvious.

Such are the elements to be kept in mind if one wishes to perceive in the following examples something other than arbitrary and unrelated changes. The question forming on the horizon is this: each time it is an affair of Māriyammaṉ, goddess at the center

[34]Cf. below, p. 263.

[35]The firewalk, for its part, does not appear to be connected with any specific goddesses, nor even with a particular location in the inhabited space.

and inseparable from a post, can one recover a general law—in eastern Tamilnadu or in the Kongu area—of the organization of her cult that makes of each particular case a simple variation on a fundamental theme? And why stop when the matter is taking shape so well? If such a general law emerges in which the initial symbolic elements coexist, can it be formulated in such a way that it encompasses the grāmadevatās of Āndhra[36] and their Pōtu Rāju?

But let us get to the second example we announced of an evident transformation of a stone post into an instrument of torture. This will take us along the coast a little south of Puttūr to the Nellukkaḍai Māriyamman̲ temple of Nāgapaṭṭiṉam (Tanjavur Dt.). This temple of Māriyamman̲-of-the-paddy-shop belongs to a Veḷḷāḷa Piḷḷai family. It would be likely that this family has a particular importance in the locality and that the sanctuary, situated at its "center," is entirely their concern. The cult, in any case, is carried out in splendor and attracts numerous devotees. The two edifices included within the enclosure are both oriented toward the east, the main one dedicated to Māriyamman̲, a seated effigy with four arms; the second, smaller and set back, containing at the back a four-armed statue of Reṇukā that is very similar to its neighbor, and in front of it but on the same axis a head of Ellaiyamman̲, whose effigy receives the worship. The very name of Ellaiyamman̲ ("goddess of the boundary") announces that here again the deities who preside respectively at the center and the boundary of the settlement are closely associated to the point of being contiguous in space and celebrated at the same time. Their distinction is functional and perhaps hierarchical, although at the time of the annual festival in Cittirai (April-May) the two goddesses go out together on the same processional "vehicle." Two priests are attached to the temple service, a gurukkaḷ—whose very presence indicates a "promotion" of the goddess and a certain regularization of the cult on the model of the great Śaiva temples (the same holds for the Nandin who appears in front of Māriyamman̲)—and a paṇḍāram who is apparently present for the daily worship of Reṇukā-Ellaiyamman̲.[37] Be that as it may, the spatial and cultic proximity emphasizes, as at Puttūr, the close complementarity of the two goddesses, a complementarity that one can expect to confirm even when they have separate sanctuaries and really do occupy the center and the boundary of the settlement (as for example Māriyamman̲ in the center and Celliyamman̲ on the northern boundary of Samayapuram, or elsewhere). In a region where the *Devī-māhātmya* seems to be unknown at the popular level, this situation translates into cultic facts the mythical doubling of the Goddess into Caṇḍī (to take, for example, her most current name in Bengal) and Kālī, the latter emanating from Caṇḍī to gather the *blood* of the demon, which Caṇḍī is unable to do alone. The simple mention of blood implies hierarchy.

In the Nāgapaṭṭiṉam temple, this complementarity is materialized by the presence before Reṇukā-Ellaiyamman̲'s sanctuary of a stone post, identical to those encountered

[36]We shall continue to employ the term *grāmadevatā* in the restricted sense we have seen it assume in Āndhra, where boundary goddesses are dominant. In Tamil, this term (incidentally Sanskrit) encompasses all deities whose shrines belong to the village and whose cults involve the entire village. Māriyamman̲ is one of them, but so are the goddess of the boundary, Aiyaṉār, etc. Cf. below, p. 135.

[37]The inquiry was made in such jostled conditions, against a background of noise, that fundamental questions of this type were simply not asked.

in Kāñcī and Uttaramērūr that were associated with the boundary. Here, the post is separated from the building's entrance by a lion, mount of the virgin and warrior goddess, and by a Munnaḍiyāṉ in relief on a stone stele, in all aspects similar to the anonymous vīraṉ who already figures at the base of the stone post. This ensemble is blackened and glistens from the dousings of oil and butter that it receives every day (plate 54).

The annual festival must last eighteen days, a fateful number that seems to be derived from the Draupadī cult, unless it would be directly chosen for its classical sacrificial symbolism. But the festival itself makes sheer plagiarism of an upper caste Śaivite festival. The costly processions of the goddesses taken out every day, each time with a different vehicle, have a function that is at least as much ostentation as ritual. We will thus focus only on the tenth day. This is the day of the *tēr* procession; that is, the day of the heavy chariot that requires the entire day to traverse the four streets that are reserved for this purpose, which form a quadrilateral (they are probably the same ones that are traversed for the Śiva temple). This Māriyammaṉ "of the lineage" thus raises herself to the dignity of a great deity presiding over the destinies of the cosmos. In the evening, however, an element of ritual is conserved that could be thought to derive from another epoch and from goddesses of another status, closer to what one knows of them elsewhere. A third priest, a Vaṉṉi this time, has joined the team that customarily works for the period of the festival. On the first day, it was he who installed Māriyammaṉ's karagam before her principal mūrti in the sanctum after having carried it in procession into the temple. He reappears on the tenth day after the return of the tēr. For the first time since the festival's beginning, the processional wooden statues of Kāttavarāyaṉ and his two Brahman wives, Kaṟuppaḷagi (another name for Kaṟuppāyi, mentioned above) and Āryāmālā (whom he had abducted), and his friend Ciṉṉaṉ,[38] are taken out. They are placed outside the temple, near the entrance. The Vaṉṉi priest, dressed as Kāttavarāyaṉ, arrives at the same time. In front of the temple, but on the axis of Māriyammaṉ's sanctuary, a kaḷumaram, approximately six meters high and fashioned of *kaḷḷimarudu* wood,[39] has been prepared, the end of which no one could precisely describe;[40] apparently the post is renewed each year. It must at least include a tenon (see plate 58, of an old engraving) upon which is placed a transverse pole that swings up and down in the manner of the poles used for irrigation in the Tamil countryside. The kaḷumaram serves, in fact, as a pivot, and the whole apparatus functions as a *ceṭil-maram*; that is, it is a variant of the hook-swinging post. Devotees under vows relating

[38]These wooden statues are kept in the Māriyammaṉ temple in a separate subshrine where they are complemented by a severed human head placed on the ground between Kāttavarāyaṉ and Āryāmālā: this is the head of the latter's guardian whom Kāttavarāyaṉ had to slay. For us, but only for us, this is Jamadagni, Renukā's husband.

[39]Which I was unable to identify. The *kalli* is a euphorbia which, in principle, cannot provide a pole of six meters. But Beck (1981) mentions a post of lesser height made of "milk-hedge" (Tamil *tirukaḷḷi*), a variety of euphorbia that one would also not expect to furnish a post. The *marutu*, on the other hand, is the *Terminalia arjuna* (Skt. *arjuna*). Is there a variety of marutu or kalli that would be designated by the compound *kallimarutu?* Let us only bear in mind that kallis are plants with milky sap.

[40]Cf. above, pp. 18-19, the hook-swinging post of the Ellamma temple in Mannūru whose uppermost portion is reminiscent of the form of the Pōtu Rāju fashioned of śamī wood.

to one of their children make an offering to Kāttavarāyaṉ and confide the child to the Vaṉṉi priest, who closes himself with the child in a kind of wooden cage attached to one end of the transverse pole. The other end is activated to send the child with the priest into the air in a rite that only remotely resembles a form of torture. But older forms are well attested and moreover still practiced, for example, during the pilgrimage to Māriyammaṉ in Samayapuram (Tiruchirapalli Dt., Lalgudi Tk.),[41] or to the much celebrated Subrahmaṇya shrine in Kataragama (Sri Lanka). There, it is essentially a matter of piercing the skin of the back with hooks and being suspended in the air. The devotee who subjects himself to this treatment would earlier have had to assume the bearing of a warrior, brandishing a weapon, etc. At Nāgapaṭṭinam, this rite is of course done in commemoration of Kāttavarāyaṉ's desire for a Brahman woman. This is the form of torture inflicted upon him by Māriyammaṉ, but the devotee submits himself to it only in acknowledgement of a blessing received from the goddess and in consequence of a vow.

The comparison of the two temples at Puttūr and Nāgapaṭṭiṉam and the pair of goddesses Māriyammaṉ-Ellaiyammaṉ who dwell there is illuminating. First, it is not by chance that the ceḍil at Nāgapaṭṭiṉam is, in the language of informants (the temple owners and their priests), broken down into a vertical element and a transverse pole, and that the vertical post bears the name kaḷumaram, the name given in Puttūr to the impalement stake that clearly reproduces the form of Pōtu Rāju, elongated to make it functional. There is thus a passage in the awareness of the people from this stake to the hook-swinging post. Moreover, the presence at the same temple of the stone post in front of Reṇukā only prepares symbolically for the torture of the impalement stake, and there is also a passage, although perhaps less conscious, from the stone post to the kaḷumaram. To us, the continuity seems obvious. At Puttūr it is always only animals that are subjected to the same form of torture as Kāttavarāyaṉ, but the devotees who subsequently participate in the firewalk effect a kind of substitution, even if they are not aware of doing so. As will soon become clear, they dedicate themselves to the goddess through the fire, as Kāttavarāyaṉ earned his status as guardian on the impalement stake. The fire, on the other hand, is surreptitiously introduced in the ritual at Nāgapaṭṭiṉam in the form of the Vaṉṉi priest who, as a Kṣatriya "of the lineage of Agni," embodies precisely the tortured Kāttavarāyaṉ. The firewalk is opposed to the ceḍil as the horizontal to the vertical, as the female araṇi to the male araṇi, or again as the śamī womb to the pipal that engenders the fire. The opposition of the vertical to the horizontal becomes still more obvious when one compares another form of ceḍil practiced at the Muttumāriyammaṉ temple in Kaṉṉiyakōyil with the firewalk at the Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ temple in the same locality. In front of the small and unpretentious Muttumāriyammaṉ temple, which is at the center of the village and served by a Vaṉṉi priest, there stands watch an anthropomorphic Kāttavarāyaṉ. He is represented in bas-relief on a stele of flat stone in the customary posture of the Tamil vīraṉ. Nothing thereabouts recalls the post or the kaḷumaram. There on the ninth and final day of the annual festival (the only one on which something more really happens besides the deployment of the goddess's banner

[41]Cf. Younger (1980) and below, pp. 249-50.

on the first day in the presence of a gurukkaḷ priest), the devotees who have made vows come to pierce their skin with needles in the presence of the goddess. This rite is explicitly designated as ceḍil. We thus have a series of formal transformations that, beginning with Pōtu Rāju, proceed by way of the stone post-with-vīraṉ, the diverse stakes (see also below), and the equally diverse ceḍils. The firewalk illustrates another series of complementary transformations, as will be seen later. In parallel, the wicked Kāttavarāyaṉ oscillates between the position of the tortured, the victim of the goddess who punishes him for his crime, and the vīraṉ who guards the same goddess. Completely passed over in silence is the brahmanicide for which he is made culpable in the epic-purāṇic myth. Rather, the accusation is limited to the abduction of a Brahman woman, a transgression indeed worthy of a Kṣatriya, even should it entail the pain of death. The ambiguity of the victim-guardian is not at all surprising after the study of Pōtu Rāju: it only brings the classical hero nearer to the buffalo demon and introduces them both into an identical cultic structure of which the animal sacrifices or human "tortures" recall the sacrificial significance.[42] The transformation of the epic crime into the abduction of a Brahman woman also prepares the way for an alignment with the version of the myth, widespread in Karṇāṭaka, in which the story of the Goddess as slayer of the Buffalo centers on the fraudulent marriage of a young Brahman girl with a man of low caste. It is in Kongunad, and thus in immediate proximity to Karṇāṭaka, that one finds this aspect of the situation taking on its full development.

b. Stakes along the Lower Kāverī, Tanjavur District

The Pōtu Rāju fashioned of wood has thus been scaled down under our very eyes, but the element of "torture post" that it has had from the beginning has been replicated in an impalement stake, the kaḻumaram, and a ceḍil, the hook-swinging post (or the needle inserted beneath the skin that resembles the stake at least as much as the ceḍil) that retains the name kaḻumaram for its vertical post. Two kinds of torture or of "putting to death" are thus separately proposed, but in a largely symbolic form. The examples of Māriyammaṉ temples, which will now be briefly analyzed, all of which are located along the lower Kāverī valley between Tañcāvūr (Tanjavur) and the sea, present, on the contrary, variations in detail. Here one finds a characteristic combination of the impalement stake and the ceḍil that is always composed of a horizontal and cruciform element at the base of the impalement stake, each end of the cross having an iron hook. The shaft of the post itself has more or less disappeared. We would only be able to see this apparatus—the name of which varies—as a raw and opaque fact, one more picturesque feature of the Tamil countryside, had we not proceeded by way of intermediary transformations.

[42]The connection imposes itself all the more since at Kaṉṉiyakōyil, Māriyammaṉ is represented seated with her right foot placed on a severed head of a demon, identified without hesitation as that of Mahiṣāsura. In Nāgapaṭṭiṉam, Māriyammaṉ, dressed as Durgā and accompanied by Ellaiyammaṉ, goes out on a lion (made of wood and mounted on wheels) on the ninth day of the festival to slay the demon Mahiṣa. As for the temple at Puttūr, we shall later see an entirely reinterpreted Buffalo appear there, thus present without being an object of the popular consciousness. Need we add that the classical Reṇukā has no discernible relation with the Buffalo in her myth?

It is here still only a matter of samples collected almost by chance along the way, which are certainly very deficient as regards the number of Māriyamman temples having this same element (the cases described are all located south of the Kāverī, which in no way presupposes the situation on the northern bank). When all is said and done, the combined stake and post is as little spectacular as the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra, and it is only noticed if one is aware of its significance.[43] One observes that it is never alone, but is found associated in ritual with relatively varied practices, themselves symbolically linked or complementary, which are scarcely removed from the "tortures" already observed in the absence of this particular architectural detail. It is not possible to economize on the observed variations to offer a reductive generalization, but neither shall we shall linger over details of the cult that may be purely repetitive or that would be related to the local geography (the names of villages, for example, even if the latter might be pertinent in another context). On the other hand, mythic elements will be carefully noted, precisely because they are extraordinarily diverse, although they elaborate indefinitely on a stable framework.

At Tiruvalañcuri (Tanjavur Dt., Kumbakonam Tk.), the temple of Mahāmāri ("the Great Māriyamman"—that is, Māriyamman's local name) has a gurukkaḷ priest for the goddess, whereas the priest for Pēcciyamman (the goddess who slays children) and the balipīṭha, personified here under the name Munnaḍiyān, is Vanniyar (or Paḍaiyāṭci, to respect the local designation). As it is not accorded a special priest, it is most likely that the kalumaram[44] is linked in this personification to the balipīṭha with which it shares the brickwork socle, or even that it forms the balipīṭha's determining element, although it is designated separately as a *śūla* or *vēl*.[45] Notwithstanding this structured group of priests, it was confessed to me with regret that the temple's festival had not taken place for five years for lack of income. This could signify that the temple no longer had the benefit of lands once attached to its cult and that the villagers had not yet brought relief in the form of voluntary contributions. However, this festival is still known to have included the erection of a ceḍil post made of teak in front of the temple, a few meters in front of the balipīṭha. This post had at its top a transverse pole provided with a hook upon which a goat was suspended by the skin of its back. The goat was released after having turned a few times in the air: apparently the pole pivoted on the post rather than swinging as at Nāgapaṭṭiṉam. This must have been a rudimentary replica of the fine hook-swinging post in Mannūru in Āndhra (see above, pp. 18-19). The fact that the

[43]I leave aside the large Māriyamman temple at Samayapuram (Tiruchirapalli Dt., Lalgudi Tk.), where the ritual, in the hands of gurukkaḷs but controlled by the devasthānam of Srirangam, is in itself "normalized" and without great interest. We shall, however, speak of it again with regard to the Karappucāmi of the same place. My own studies were made in 1981.

[44]I will continue by convention to apply this generic term to the new form now under consideration, in which the impalement stake is connected with a hook-swinging apparatus. It is not an inappropriate extension, since, as we will see, the radical *kalu-* recurs with insistence. This name thus cannot be disregarded, since it is an element of continuity with the preceding forms.

[45]I will have to speak again of the *śūla* (or *vēl*, this name being better known in connection with Subrahmanya's weapon, which I will not discuss here). It is not in this context the trident of Śiva or the goddess, but a weapon with a single point, the sharp part of which has a form very similar to the terminal knob of a Pōtu Rāju (plate 62).

victim was released alive implies that there would have been no animal sacrifice during the festival. The goat, moreover, was here the substitute for a human "victim" and there was no mention of any sort of ritual torture. But human volunteers probably once rotated from the ceḍil post. No element of myth, no representation in the temple, evokes Kāttavarāyaṉ, although the kaḻumaram seems to be related to his impalement. Only the ceḍil post still recalls the kaḻumaram, and collective memory appears to be rapidly fading.[46]

The Māriyammaṉ temple at Valattūr (Tanjavur Dt., Pāpanāsam Tk.) is also at the center of the village and oriented toward the east. In a certain way the situation resembles that at Tiruvalañcuri, since the festival has not taken place for several years. But a *kumbhābhiṣeka* has just been held, a ceremony reconsecrating the sanctuary subsequent to its renovation, and the intention is to resume the celebration of the annual festival in Cittirai. The gathering of informants upon our arrival indicates that this is a lively population aware of the importance of the goddess's worship. The dominant and thus landowning caste is composed of Kaḷḷars, a caste with a martial background like their Maṟavar cousins. In Valattūr, they live far to the north of the areas of their caste's main distribution, and must have settled here long ago, long enough in any case to consider themselves far superior to those in Madurai. They have a clear appreciation of spatial organization: the Brahmans (Aiyangar Viṣṇuites and Smārta Aiyars, whom I did not see) are in the north around a Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu) temple. Also in the north are the artisan castes, the Ācāris. The Kaḷḷars, for their part, are practically all in the south, thus implicitly recognizing their inferior status despite their economic superiority. To the east and the west, where agricultural laborers are recruited, are two *cēris* or hamlets of very low service castes (Paṟaiyars and Paḷḷars). A single Veḷḷāḷa family provides the priest for Māriyammaṉ, while the neighboring temple to Aiyaṉār is served by a gurukkaḷ. The village headman, a Kaḷḷar, functions as the dharmakartā of the temple and decides everything (it is he who chose my interlocutors!).

The presence of the Kaḷḷars is certainly not at all foreign to the local version of the myth of Kāttavarāyaṉ and the kaḻumaram (plates 55, 56). It is, in fact, not very hard to imagine a complicity between this Kṣatriya of few scruples and the Kaḷḷars, who see their past as that of a warrior caste.[47] Kāttavarāyaṉ was indeed destined here to torture by impalement on the kaḻumaram installed in front of the sanctuary, but owing to the shrewdness of his friend Cinnaṉ ("the small one"), he was able to escape. As the story goes, a Ceṭṭi (a caste of wealthy merchants, no doubt traditional victims of the Kaḷḷars) passed by and, seeing the impalement stake, asked what it was. Cinnaṉ suggested that he go up to the top to see, and took advantage of the Ceṭṭi's position there to impale him

[46]This contrasts with many other temples in this region and in Kongunad (also visited in 1981; see below) that seem to be undergoing a manner of revival: renovation of buildings, of the icon, recontinuation (in Kongunad) of the buffalo sacrifice. No general conclusion should be drawn from this local decline. Perhaps the village is torn by factional quarrels?

[47]This is the case with practically all castes in south India that assert a royal status, or whose members have exercised royal power at one moment or another: Kaḷḷar, Maṟavar, Marāṭha, etc., and we shall not make the mistake here of a Eurocentric perspective that would lead to their inclusion in what the British of the Belle Epoque called "criminal" tribes, a category in any case foreign to the Indian spirit.

in Kāttavarāyaṉ's place. After his death, eagles (or vultures?)—*kaḻuku*—came to eat his eyes, and since then it is he to whom one offers worship on the impalement stake, calling him *Kaḻuvuḍaiyaṉ,* "lord of the impalement stake." In the maṇḍapa of the temple, in a row facing north, are painted wooden statues of Kāttavarāyaṉ surrounded by his two Brahman wives, Kaḻuvuḍaiyaṉ, Cinnaṉ, and Karuppucāmi.

On the first day of the festival, three days after the new moon of Cittirai, the banner is raised (for which a temporary pole is erected) by calling on the gurukkaḷ of the Aiyaṉār temple who performs the ritual according to the most "orthodox" forms (oblations in the fire, pots of lustral water sprinkled on the sites and the gods, etc.). On this day, the gurukkaḷ himself ties the kāppus (or *kaṅkaṇas*, protective threads colored yellow with turmeric) on all deities of the temple, including the *parivara-devatās* enumerated above: Pēcciyāyi, Gaṇeśa, the balipīṭha, the kaḻumaram, and the flagpole with the banner. At that time, the Veḷḷāḷa priest sacrifices a goat to the goddess at the base of the flagpole. A week follows during which simple rites of daily ablutions take place, as if it were a matter of filling a period with a minimum of rites (and a minimum of costs) that makes it possible to bring the goddess's festival into conformity with the general schema: either that of ten days with a high point on the eighth or ninth, as in the autumnal Durgāpūjā, or that of eighteen days (as in the Draupadī cult). To the number eighteen is attached a pan-Indian sacrificial symbolism. Here, the festival lasts seventeen days plus one, with a nearly empty week at the beginning.

On the eighth day, the gurukkaḷ returns and, following a ritual analogous to that performed on the first day, with oblations into the fire and purifications with lustral water,[48] he ties kaṅkaṇas to the utsavamūrtis, to the Veḷḷāḷa serving Māriyammaṉ, and to the two Veṭṭiyārs (Paṟaiyar drummers). Parallel to this, a second goat is sacrificed at the base of the flagpole. In actual fact, among the processional mūrtis, the four that are kept in the goddess's sanctum—Aiyaṉār, Coliṅgarāyaṉ, and two Piḍāris, goddesses respectively of the settlement's northern and southern boundaries—are first taken to the neighboring Aiyaṉār temple, whose festival is taking place at the same time. From there, Coliṅgarāyaṉ, Aiyaṉār's general, and the two Piḍāris[49] are led to their respective sanctuaries where the gurukkaḷ will tie kaṅkaṇas on them. Aiyaṉār receives his in his temple. It is interesting to note that the festival of the god, considered to be the "guardian" of the locality, is already associated with that of the goddesses, whereas Perumāḷ-Viṣṇu remains distant and follows his own cycle of festivals. When night has fallen on the same eighth day, the utsavamūrtis of Māriyammaṉ, Aiyaṉār, and Coliṅgarāyaṉ meet in the village (there is a large open area between the goddess's temple and that of Aiyaṉār) and go out in procession, covering all the local streets. For seven days, that is, until the festival's fourteenth day, his procession takes place every evening.

[48]To which must be added this time the sowing of small clay pots filled with soil—*pālikai,* Skt. *pālikā,* "the protectress" (?)—that remain in the darkness of the sanctum during the festival. The white shoots that result will be distributed as prasāda to the public on the last day.

[49]The local legend would have that there was first only one Pidāri, situated on the northern boundary. Another came from Mānakkāl, a neighboring locality, the status of which I am not able to clarify in relation to Valattūr. This second Pidāri, stronger than the first, assumed her place in the north, leaving to the former one the southern boundary. This is one of many ways to affirm the preeminence of the north over the south.

The fifteenth day is devoted to the procession of the tēr, or rather tērs, since Aiyaṉār and Māriyammaṉ each have their own, while Coliṅgarāyaṉ and the two Piḍāris are carried by local people. Before the tērs set out, the gurukkaḷ honors the (Kaḷḷar) notables of the village who collectively act as dharmakartā for the occasion. A goat is sacrificed in front of each tēr. Aiyaṉār's tēr takes the lead, but it is explicitly said that the goat is offered to Coliṅgarāyaṉ, not to Aiyaṉār. One goat (the goddess's) is offered by the village headman and is returned to him after its immolation. The other, provided by the collectivity, is given to the two Veṭṭiyārs. The tērs set off first to the north, but cover all the streets of the village. There is no quadrilateral course specific to their itinerary. The heavy processional chariot has here the usual martial and royal significance that it has everywhere else, but its route shows that one is not at the level of the universal;[50] it is the whole of the locality such as it is that is implicated in the cult of the goddesses and of Aiyaṉār.[51] The tērs conclude their journey in front of the Māriyammaṉ temple, in the aforementioned large space free for such evident cultural usages as have already been mentioned. The other utsavamūrtis are placed on the ground. During this time, villagers file past with their offerings and the gurukkaḷ performs ārati as often as it is requested of him. The sixteenth day is that of the final benediction of the mūrtis; in the course of a final procession, the people sprinkle them with *kumkum* water. Then on the seventeenth day the banner is lowered and kaṅkaṇas are removed.

The festival, however, includes an additional day that can be either a day earlier or later: this is the day devoted exclusively to the fulfillment of vows made to the goddess, in which ritual tortures have their customary place in more or less attenuated forms. The generic term to designate them is *kāvaṭi,* which one knows above all in the restricted sense it is given in the worship of Subrahmaṇya. The term designates first all kinds of poles or posts for carrying burdens, often with an arch over them that is maintained above the head of the devotee. Here, Māriyammaṉ is gratified with three kinds of kāvaṭi. First, *alaku-kāvaṭi* is a kāvaṭi whose arch is maintained above the devotee's head by means of long needles (*alaku*)—which can be called *ceḍil*—that are inserted beneath the skin. The term *alaku* here places emphasis on the sharp point like that of a weapon. The second, *pāl-kāvaṭi,* causes less suffering: it is a pole with a decorated arch carried on the shoulder that is provided at either end with a metal pot full of milk (*pāl*) to be offered to the goddess. Finally, the *tēr-kāvaṭi* is a decorated miniature chariot pulled by a rope to which hooks are affixed; these are to be put through the skin on the back of the devotee, who ends his route before the goddess's sanctuary. These three types of kāvaṭi can without question be viewed as so many variations of the ceḍil.[52]

The village does not observe the autumnal Navarātri with any celebration. It seems that something associated with it once took place at the Perumāḷ temple. It may be supposed that here, as at other places, modern transformation of "royal" power struc-

[50]It will be recalled that the rathavīthi, the quadrilateral followed by the tērs of Viṣṇu or Śiva, symbolizes the total space circumscribed by the four directions, the cosmos. It was not possible within the limits of this study to determine whether the chariot of the local Perumāḷ has a rathavīthi.

[51]The examination of the latter would require another study.

[52]The necessary corollary being that the kāvaḍi brought to the Subrahmaṇya temple (plate 57) is another variant of the ceḍil. A similar combination of practices is brought together for Kataragama (see above, p. 126).

tures led to the disappearance of festivals that required extravagance and pomp. In the south, where the autumnal Durgāpūjā has always been less important than the goddess's springtime festival, it is normal that the former would disappear first when royal pomp could no longer display itself. It is even possible that the autumn festival would only have been conducted in an emphatic manner where royal capitals gave it its full sociological dimension (Maisūr, Rāmanāthapuram, for example): the presence of vassals renewing their allegiance to the king, etc. It is not certain, however, that one can establish a general rule here.[53]

At the Kṣetrapālapuram Māriyamman̲ temple (Tanjavur Dt., Mayavaram Tk.), Paḍaiyāṭcis or Van̲niyars are again predominant. Like all the "secondary" (that is, subordinate) temples of the village, it is maintained by the Śiva Sundareśvara temple, but its annual festival remains a responsibility of the inhabitants. The Māriyamman̲ priest is a paṇḍāram. Of the five official dharmakartās (appointed by political authorities), the main one—the "true" one, according to the traditional appraisals, which only partially correspond to the decisions from above—is a Paḍaiyāṭci landowner, as could have been expected. The temple is located alongside the fields on the western side of the settlement; nonetheless, it is said to be at its center, even though the agglomeration is clearly divided into two parts by paddy fields. To the east are the Brahmans, Paḍaiyāṭcis, and Veḷḷāḷar Piḷḷais, and to the west are Nāḍārs and Par̲aiyars. The center thus becomes a theoretical notion, as low-caste hamlets (such as those of Nāḍārs and Par̲iayars) are normally separated from the rest of the population. Not far off to the north, the Kāverī flows by parallel to the temple and beyond a large square tank adjacent to the temple's northern side. The edifice itself includes the sanctum and a permanent maṇḍapa, the latter sheltering the processional mūrtis, surrounded by a wide veranda covered by a tile roof. Before the sanctuary and on its axis are situated, first, a quite tall balipīṭha, alone bearing the unexpected but familiar name of Mun̲n̲aḍiyān̲, and then beside the balipīṭha to its east is a kal̲umaram—the local designation—similar in structure to that in Tiruvalañcuri and Valattūr, but entirely of iron and set in a brickwork socle (plate 59). The kal̲umaram in Valattūr has a wooden base which, although in bad condition, retains something of the form of Pōtu Rāju. That is no longer the case with the one in Kṣetrapālapuram, which could not be associated with anything known to us had we not proceeded by way of all the intermediary links. A Pēcciyamman̲ disemboweling a child faces north on the level of the balipīṭha and the kal̲umaram.

The annual festival takes place in Cittirai and lasts altogether ten days, or nine plus one. It begins on the Tuesday closest to the full moon of Cittirai. Day by day, nine persons from the village (other than the dharmakartās) must share the costs: a Brahman, a Piḷḷai, a Paḍaiyāṭci, a Ceṭṭiyār, a Par̲aiyar, plus four volunteers. It is specified that the procession of the goddess's utsavamūrti is more costly than her procession in the form of the karagam: on this is based a hierarchy of merits and above all of honors. On the first day, at around five o'clock in the evening, the priest and musicians (Par̲aiyars) carry to the Kāverī a metal pot, a sword, and the *cekkumāndaḍi*—sometimes *cukkumāndaḍi* (plate 61)—a kind of club or stick more massive at one end than the other. They

[53]Cf. below as concerns the śamīpūjā, pp. 288 ff.

bathe the three objects in the river and clean them (annually!) before depositing them on the river bank. It is thus a matter of transforming the metal pot into the goddess's karagam and then of taking the latter out in procession to the village's eastern and western boundaries for a rite of "binding the cardinal points"—*digbandhana* (Tamil, *ellai kaṭṭutal*). It is as if one were in a Śiva temple, and the āgamic ritual takes place here even in the absence of a gurukkaḷ. The karagam procession then visits the Nāḍār and Paṟaiyar quarters (which are in the west, the last boundary to be "closed"), before returning to the temple. After the dharmakartās have worshipped the karagam and given two pieces of clothing to the paṇḍāram, the karagam is then taken out in procession through the two parts of the village, always carried by the paṇḍāram and accompanied by his musicians. There are offerings of coconuts, bananas, etc. Then, having been returned to the temple, the karagam is placed in the sanctuary and the principal mūrti is worshipped.

The second day includes another procession to the Kāverī with the same participants and the same objects. The withered garlands of the previous day are removed from the metal pot and it is once again decorated. Having returned to the temple to offer worship, the two sections of the village are again visited with the karagam. In other words, the ritual is identical to that of the preceding day and only the binding of the cardinal points is missing. The latter obviously takes place only once at the beginning of the festival to prevent the intrusion of foreign and malevolent deities into the goddess's territory. The ritual of the second day is repeated for six days. The goddess, represented by the decorated metal pot as a karagam, is alone only in appearance, for, if one looks at the painted wooden mūrtis—the utsavamūrtis—present inside the temple maṇḍapa, one sees that Kāttavarāyaṉ carries a sword and Karuppucāmi a cekkumāndaḍi. The two "demons" are placed on either side of the goddess and form her guard. It is obvious that the sword and the cekkumāndaḍi of the karagam processions represent them in the same function.

The festival culminates on the seventh day, since it includes the firewalk and other forms of ritual torture, as well as the tēr procession. The paṇḍāram and his musicians go with a few villagers to the potter, from whom, for a fee, a clay pot has been ordered. This is taken to the temple and a *dīpārādhanā* is performed to the goddess. Once again the priest and his companions go to the river, but this time the customary sword and cekkumāndaḍi are complemented by the clay pot in place of the metal kalaśa of the first days. Following the bath, the clay pot is filled with river water and its opening is decorated with margosa leaves: the pot has thus become the *śaktikarakam* and can be nothing other than the representation of the goddess. It is taken to the temple and placed in the sanctum near the *mūlavar,* the principal and permanent mūrti of Māriyammaṉ.[54] During this time a gurukkaḷ has come to purify the temple and perform an *abhiṣeka* to the mūlavar and the three utsavamūrtis: the goddess and her two bodyguards, Kāttavarāyaṉ and Karuppu. The mūlavar is then heavily decorated and covered with garlands.

[54]In all the Māriyammaṉ temples listed here, the principal mūrti is seated and has four arms bearing the expected weapons, with slight variations (there are sometimes even variations in the same sanctuary between the mūlavar and the processional mūrti). She folds her left leg on the seat while her right leg is pendant. One notes the nearly constant absence of a severed head of an asura beneath her right foot. As befits the center of a settlement, this is a benevolent form of the goddess.

The gurukkaḷ performs a "yajña"—simple oblations of wood and oil into a fire he has previously installed in the maṇḍapa, facing the goddess. He then ties protective kaṅkaṇas to the paṇḍāram priests (of whom there are two during the festival), the mūlavar, the utsavamūrtis, the sword, the cekkumāndaḍi, the kaḷumaram, and Munnaḍiyāṉ (the balipīṭha). Pēcciyammaṉ is not included in the festival as she receives no kaṅkaṇa.

During this time, a shallow pit—sixteen feet long and five wide—has been prepared in front of the sanctuary, eight feet from the kaḷumaram. The paṇḍāram takes the fire from the yajña to kindle the wood that fills the pit. The task of preparing the fire of the *tīmidi* is not reserved for a specialist, since the village has no representative from the caste of Ācāris (the five types of artisans). While the clay śaktikaragam is left in the temple, the metal kalaśa employed in the processions held on the first days, the cekkumāndaḍi, and the sword are brought out of the temple. An ārati with camphor is made to them before they are taken to the river, where they are bathed and the kalaśa is newly decorated to make it a more lavish karagam than the preceding ones. At the same time, devotees who are under vows bathe in the river and then, dressed in yellow clothing, stand in front of the karagam. They have been fasting since the festival's beginning, and now receive the kaṅkaṇa from the paṇḍāram when they bathe in the river. Eventually, having entered into a trance, the priest refuses the kaṅkaṇa to anyone not in the required state of purity. Among the penitents, some prepare to walk on the fire, alone or carrying their child, while others have chosen to pierce their skins with long needles, alaku. A widespread practice consists in piercing the entire body with 108 fine needles of about a meter in length.[55] Others combine the two forms of torture, the fire and the needles. Locally, only men can take part, but informants cited a neighboring village where women are also included. Those bearing needles pierce their skins when they receive the kaṅkaṇa. Then they go in procession to the location of the tīmidi, the karagam preceding them. As opposed to the clay pot kept in the sanctum, this karagam has the name *tī-karagam* ("fire karagam") because, carried by the paṇḍāram, it will open the firewalk.

During all these preparations, at the temple the other paṇḍāram has put the three utsavamūrtis on the *haṃsa-vāhana* (the vehicle in the form of a *haṃsa,* the bird associated with Brahmā, but also symbolizing the liberated ātman) and leaves them facing east and toward the fire. As usual, the firewalkers must enter at the eastern end and traverse the fire in a westerly direction, thus facing the goddess. Behind the karagam, those bearing needles enter first, followed by the others. All then meet in the temple where the needles are immediately removed. For about two hours, the public files past with offerings, notably lamps made of flour dough and small ex-votos of silver (today more likely of tin): the latter are in the form of a finger, a hand, etc., corresponding to the vows made on the occasion of a particular incident. The ex-voto apparently constitutes another form of "torture" rather than a reproduction of the part of the body affected and healed by the goddess: she is offered "a finger" or "a hand" in acknowledgement of the blessing received, as others walk on fire or pierce themselves with needles. However,

[55]The sacrificial symbolism of the number eighteen is found here again: 108 and 1008 are but extensions to greater numbers of the same symbolism that employs the famous positional zero instead of resorting to multiplication.

a difference should be noted that casts doubt on the significance of these ex-votos: they are taken to the goddess inside the temple, whereas everything else occurs outside. For it is after the worshippers have filed past with their offerings that the clay śaktikaragam leaves the temple to join the utsavamūrtis and the tīkaragam near the fire. All five are then put on the tēr that proceeds around the village before traversing every street accompanied by musicians. The tēr returns to the temple only around six o'clock on the morning of the following day. The goddess is thus represented in three forms: the utsavamūrti, practically identical to the mūlavar; the clay śaktikaragam filled with water and decorated with margosa leaves; and the tīkaragam.

The beginning of the festival's eighth day is thus marked by the return of the tēr in the early morning hours to a position in front of the temple. The paṇḍāram performs an ordinary abhiṣeka to the four grāmadevatās, namely, Aiyaṉār, Piḍāri, Ūrikaṭṭicāmi, and Māriyamman̲. The shrines of Aiyaṉār and Piḍāri are on the boundaries of the village; the Ūrikaṭṭicāmi temple is actually a *samādhi*. It is not without interest to note that this samādhi is a temple of the village, rather than of a lineage, as one might expect. It is also instructive to learn that Kālabhairava—the classical kṣetrapāla who gave his name to the settlement—also has a place of worship on the village boundary, but is not counted among the grāmadevatās and is thus excluded from worship involving the entire village as such. The festival concludes on the ninth day with the final procession with *mañcalnīr*, at which time the inhabitants cast turmeric water on the mūrtis and the karagams. At the end of this last excursion around the village, the water and the margosa leaves from the śaktikaragam are thrown into the tank next to the temple, while the clay pot is relegated to a corner of the shrine, to remain there until it crumbles.

The festival, however, has not yet been concluded. On the evening of the tenth day, the paṇḍāram, accompanied by a few villagers, goes to the potter and purchases two terra-cotta horses that have been made on order. With four men per horse—implying a certain size for each effigy—the two horses are conveyed to the Aiyaṉār temple where they are placed as an offering in front of the sanctuary and perpendicular to the god's mūrti. This is a nocturnal rite and no one may cross the route of those bearing the horses, the procession being announced by a gong (struck by the second paṇḍāram). After the horses have reached their destination, Maduraivīran̲, Aiyaṉār's lieutenant, receives a goat sacrifice. His effigy is located outside the sanctuary and perpendicular to it, thus facing north. During the sacrifice, the Aiyaṉār temple is closed, as one would expect. The goat meat is cooked and eaten then and there—thus at night. Participating in the feast are the two paṇḍārams, the five dharmakartās, and the horse-bearers. Aiyaṉār is here clearly a "guardian of the boundary"—*ellaikkāppar* Aiyaṉār. But the goat goes to Maduraivīran̲ because, as the informants say, it is he who fights if the need arises. It is then that the observer becomes aware that there had been no blood sacrifice at all during the Māriyamman̲ festival, and that the goat offered to Maduraivīran̲ is the only animal victim during these ten days. But the tenth day is explicitly linked to the first nine days that are consecrated to the goddess.[56]

[56]The autumnal Navarātri is marked at the Māriyamman̲ temple by only an abhiṣeka during the nine days. There is nothing more on the tenth day, but a ritual that existed up to a few years ago is still remembered: the goddess's utsavamūrti went out and the priest thrice stuck an arrow into the trunk of a banana tree. No

To account for all aspects of the entire festival would obviously involve a broadening of our study, notably to include other grāmadevatās, most particularly Aiyaṉār. It is striking that the nocturnal rite on the tenth day requires the closing of the god's sanctuary and is primarily addressed to his second—or, let us say, to his meat-eating double. This is no doubt an homage to the god, but it is also the form taken by animal sacrifice in the cult of the strictly vegetarian Māriyammaṉ, notwithstanding her function as protectress of the village. This transfer of the blood rite to a demon associated with Aiyaṉār reinforces the impression that every element of violence is kept apart from the goddess: the impalement stake and its cruciform base and hooks in front of the sanctuary no longer have any connection with a mythical form of torture. It is said locally that Māriyammaṉ had asked Kāttavarāyaṉ to make Kaṟuppucāmi the guardian of the temple. In this manner, the latter came to be installed on the kaḷumaram. From this version of the myth emerges a scarcely perceptible privileged link between Māriyammaṉ and Kāttavarāyaṉ, the latter serving as intermediary between the goddess and the black demon. But Kaṟuppu is replicated by a Muṉṉaḍiyāṉ on the balipīṭha—this multiplication of the agents of one and the same function implying a weakening of this function in each of the agents. The demonic character of Kaṟuppu and Kāttavarāyaṉ is again mitigated by the position of their bronze utsavamūrtis on either side of Māriyammaṉ in the maṇḍapa of the temple, which is something rarely seen. The goddess's utsavamūrti (of bronze) is usually clearly separated from those of her attendants (of painted wood), and the latter are then surrounded by their wives. Here, there is no spouse, no animal offering, but also no torture for a mythical misdeed.

The element of blood sacrifice, therefore, subsists only in the ritual torture of the devotees, that is, in the fire and the kaḷumaram transformed into very long needles. It is, however, perhaps this remainder of violence that gives rise to the duality of the karagams. Are these, in fact, two or three? The metal karagam at the beginning has no special name, but can only be a figure of the goddess. Its role in the binding of the cardinal points transforms her for a time into a goddess of the boundary. It is perhaps still as such that she goes out in procession in the streets of the village: is she not, with the help of her two bodyguards, the protectress of the settlement against any danger from outside? It is the preparation for the firewalk that brings this first role to an end. The goddess's pot is materially doubled with the arrival of the clay pot and the place it will occupy as śaktikaragam near the mūlavar throughout the "sacrificial" phase—firewalk, needles. But the metal pot, which then assumes the name *tī-karagam* (fire karagam) is not a simple return to the initial one. It is more profusely decorated and is not flanked by its demonic and warrior acolytes. It is essentially the form that the goddess takes for the firewalk—the warrior goddess traversing the fire of war, as elsewhere. The earthenware śaktikaragam, in contrast, remains in the darkness of the sanctum, pregnant with the world to come. The goddess is thus at once destroyer and creator. With her two faces represented by the two karagams, she ensures the continuity

one knew anything further to say, but one of the villagers present went to consult his father and returned with this response: this is the putting to death of Makiḷāsuraṉ. One is thus present at the disappearance of the demon Mahiṣa from the local collective consciousness. Makiḷāsuraṉ, even though clear for the observer, no longer evokes anything for the Tamil villager.

of the world. One can even take a chance on the material of the pots: the one that remains at the foot of the mūrti in the temple is made of earth because it is both the deified and dramatized Earth. It refers both to the goddess who does battle outside and to the world she preserves by way of her permanent effigy. Violence remains entirely outside the shrine.[57] The precautions taken to isolate the goddess from the contagion of violence bring into relief the penances inflicted on themselves by her devotees, who are for the most part meat-eaters. There is a kind of contradiction between the human torture and the vegetarianism of the goddess in which the perduring tension indwelling Hinduism is found between the violence of the sacrifice (fire + post, tīmidi + alaku) and the purity of the renouncer, both of which are necessary for the prosperity of the world. The same tension culminates on the evening of the tenth day between the homage rendered to the noble god Aiyaṉār[58] by the offering of the clay horses, on the one hand, and the closing of his sanctuary for the goat sacrifice to Maduraivīraṉ on the other. The real blood sacrifice has finally taken place, but it has been shifted to the boundary of the settlement and offered, through the mediation of a demon, to the purest of the boundary guardians. Ultimately, it is he who must be won over to the cause of the village. It is quite striking to observe that this nocturnal ritual reproduces something of the buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess on the night of Mahāṣṭamī: it is as if the task of slaying the demon, given to the Goddess by Viṣṇu and the other gods, were given back to the god Hariharaputra, the son of Viṣṇu and Śiva.

The Māriyammaṉ temple in Tirunaṉriyūr (Tanjavur Dt., Sirkali Tk.) offers nothing remarkable at first sight, but the ritual of her festival in Cittirai is more complex than that at Kṣetrapālapuram and lasts thirteen days, an unusual number for a goddess festival. This is no doubt to be explained by the grouping together of seven villages for the celebration and the resulting multiplication of processions. It is nevertheless said that Māriyammaṉ is the goddess at the center of the village, and the association with the six other temples received no justification in the course of the inquiry into the temple and its festival. Local informants (led by the Paḍaiyāṭci priest) are, however, the first to recall that Tirunaṉriyūr has a Śiva temple sung of by the Tamil Śaivite saints Appar, Cundarar, and Māṇikkavācakar. It is probable that this temple has a degree of influence in the surroundings, but it is not possible to specify its effect on the local cults. Another grouping of seven villages is found elsewhere (below, p. 259) and this should perhaps be viewed as a way to locally arrive at a figure of the cosmos. This might account for the route of Māriyammaṉ's tēr, which follows the *rathavīthi* of the Śiva temple, but this is no more than conjecture and is only to be understood as such. The village of Tirunaṉriyūr is composed almost solely of a single caste, namely, the very large majority of Paḍaiyāṭcis (as noted, another name for Vaṉniyars). Māriyammaṉ has a Paḍaiyāṭci priest and four dharmakartās, of whom three are Paḍaiyāṭcis and one a Reddi (a landowner caste of Telugu origin). A cāmiyāḍi, that is, a possessed person who here

[57]Let us also note, but at the margin of this case from which the Ācāris are absent, that the potter and his fire are opposed in their participation in the ritual to the Ācāris who habitually prepare the tīmidi fire, just as the two groups and their fires strongly distinguish themselves in their relation to Brahmans. Cf. Biardeau 1971-72.

[58]Cf. Dumont 1953.

embodies Kāttavarāyaṉ and who is also a Paḍaiyāṭci, is also attached to her cult. The temple, without architectural pretensions, is separated from its kaḷumaram (of the impalement-stake-and-hooks-type common to the entire series; plate 60) by the road from Mayavaram to Sirkali. This kaḷumaram has a remarkable socle: instead of the brickwork cube that generally supports the stake, it is topped by a square pyramid with five steps in which one finds the symbolic number of the five sacrificial fires (see above, p. 110, n. 4). The goddess's utsavamūrti is near the door of the sanctum in a kind of initial maṇḍapa, while the utsavamūrtis of Karuppucāmi and Kāttavarāyaṉ (the latter on horseback and flanked by his two wives Karuppaḷagi and Śivalakṣmī) are placed in the large maṇḍapa that encompasses the first, while the balipīṭha is sheltered beneath a simple canopy of palmyra leaves. A square enclosure isolates the temple from the road, onto which it opens to the east. The kaḷumaram, although relegated to outside the enclosure and separated by the road from the rest of the edifice, is exactly on the axis of the sanctuary. The side to the south of the enclosure is occupied by a square open area that includes a small platform in its northeastern corner (near the road) called Puttivīramēḍai. It is there that the firewalk takes place each year.

The festival begins on the first day of Cittirai. However, four days earlier, and thus in Paṅguni, a preliminary rite is performed. Māriyammaṉ's priest and the four dharmakartās conduct a pūjā to the other grāmadevatās, those of the boundary: Vīraṉ (identical, it seems, with Puttivīraṉ, of whom we shall speak further), Aiyaṉār, and Celliyammaṉ (goddess of the north). They offer a goat sacrifice to Aiyaṉār's horse and to Puttivīraṉ and Celliyammaṉ (note once again the necessary detour of the meat offering made to Aiyaṉār). At the Puttivīraṉ temple, a man enters into a trance and in this state goes to the Puttivīramēḍai, near the Māriyammaṉ temple, to respond to questions posed by the public. I am not certain if this possessed man with an oracular function is identical to the cāmiyāḍi-Kāttavarāyaṉ who later takes part in the festival of the goddess. It would seem rather that he is possessed by Puttivīraṉ himself to accomplish his oracular function. This may be a Bhūtivīra, an auspicious oracle (<Skt. *bhūti*, "prosperity"), which is not known elsewhere; local informants have nothing to say on this account. The incorporation of oracles in the ritual of the goddess seems to be rare throughout this region. What is clear is that this preliminary act of offering to the grāmadevatās of the boundaries appears as a popular equivalent to the rite of "binding the cardinal points." The oracle is no doubt linked to a specialization of the local vīraṉ. On the same day, the dharmakartās summon the two Paḍaiyāṭci priests (the father enlisting his son for the duration of the festival) and ask them to tell one and all that the festival is beginning. During this round of invitations, offerings are collected from the villagers to cover the festival's expenses, and all the houses in the seven villages are visited and called upon to contribute.

On the first day of Cittirai, after an abhiṣeka of Māriyammaṉ's mūlavar, a śūla,[59] a sword (Skt. *khaḍga*, Tamil *katti*), and a cekkumāṇḍaḍi accompany a metal pot to the nearby river (one of the Kāverī's deltaic arms) carried by the priest and the cāmiyāḍi, who are followed by the four dharmakartās and the public. It is the cāmiyāḍi who

[59]Regarding the type of pike or spear called *śūla* or *vēl*, cf. above, p. 128, n. 45 and plate 62.

carries the cekkumāndaḍi, here because it is Kāttavarāyaṉ's weapon. A bathing and cleansing of the objects precedes the decoration of the metal pot, which then becomes the śaktikaragam: it is simply filled with water and covered with margosa leaves and flowers. The karagam receives a *karpurārati* to the sound of diverse drums (of which the hourglass-shaped *uḍukkai* is purportedly Māriyammaṉ's great favorite), which signal the priest, who is offering ārati, and the man who possesses Kāttavarāyaṉ to fall into trance. The former then chants the story of Māriyammaṉ, after which the cāmiyāḍi places the karagam on the pūcāri's head for the return-procession to the temple. At the entrance to the sanctuary, the karagam is met by the assistant priest who once again performs karpurārati to it. The villagers then cast flowers on the karagam as it enters the sanctum carried on the priest's head. It is placed to the right of the mūlavar on an area of the floor that has been covered with soil in which seeds of an unspecified leguminous plant are sewn (an echo of the navadhānya rite). A solemn pūjā to the goddess follows this; then the devotees file past with their offerings and receive prasāda. A good part of the night is occupied with the story of Kāttavarāyaṉ as chanted by the priest to the accompaniment of drums. On the second day, after the customary daily pūjā in the morning, the mūlavar receives an abhiṣeka. There is a second abhiṣeka in the evening at about six o'clock, after which the priest resumes with the story of Kāttavarāyaṉ until two or three in the morning.

On the third day, following the performance of the usual rite, preparations are made to place the goddess's utsavamūrti in a miniature edifice (*muttuvimānam*) carried on a bullock cart. The goddess will proceed through all the streets of Tirunaṉriyūr, flanked by the utsavamūrtis of Kāttavarāyaṉ and Kaṟuppucāmi and accompanied by the pūcāri's son, while the pūcāri himself remains in the maṇḍapa of the temple to continue narrating the Kāttavarāyaṉ story until the procession's return on the following morning at around six o'clock. The festival proceeds in the same manner on the fourth and fifth days. On the sixth, the only variation is the extension of the route covered by the procession, which goes to one of the six associated villages, Coḻacakkaranallūr. On the seventh, the goddess proceeds through Kuḍanadamaṅgai and Mēlaveḷi. Kāttavarāyaṉ's story is continued night after night, and on this seventh the pūcāri sings of his marriage with Āryāmālā. It will be recalled that the latter is a Brahman's daughter whom the asuric king has abducted. Here Kāttavarāyaṉ, who is no other than the son of Māriyammaṉ, has received a favor from his maternal uncle, Kṛṣṇa, who promises to officiate as purohita at his marriage. The marriage of Kāttavarāyaṉ and Āryāmālā is also enacted and celebrated on this night: a Brahman is summoned, the Aiyar Purohita, who is Kṛṣṇa himself. He conducts a marriage homa as prescribed, while two men are dressed to play the roles of Kāttavarāyaṉ and Āryāmālā. The purohita has made a fire on the bare ground into which to pour his oblations: he feeds it with wood from different *Ficus* trees with milky sap, with vaṉṉi (or śamī) wood, and with mango wood. The fire is left to go out on its own after the ritual performance has been concluded.

The procession on the eighth day encompasses the villages of Ilaiyaṅkuḍi and Āḍaikkalāpuram, and on the ninth day, Ālaveḷi, which completes the list of seven villages that participate in the festival. On this day, during the procession (which is always at night), Paḍaiyāṭcis disguise themselves as Śakti, Śiva, Kāttavarāyaṉ, Ciṉṉaṉ (Kāttavarāyaṉ's friend or younger brother), and Kālī, and gather near the kaḻumaram

or the kaḷuvaḍi.[60] The śūla that had gone in procession to the river on the first day (plate 62) is then installed in front of the kaḷuvaḍi, and the pūcāri chants of the torture of Kāttavarāyaṉ, impaled because of his marriage to a Brahman woman. While telling of the impalement, he impales a lemon on the śūla: the lemon is Kāttavarāyaṉ. At this point, if we can say that the rite is clear, the myth becomes complicated, for it is necessary at the same time to account for the survival of Kāttavarāyaṉ and for his permanent relationship with the goddess. The kaḷuvaḍi contains an *uyir*, a "life" or "vital principle." It was Śiva who had condemned Kāttavarāyaṉ to the kaḷu, but his mother, "Śakti," accorded him the boon of immortality: he cannot die and his body will not be "burned" (At the stake? This *is* curious!). She advises her son to cut down the kaḷu and move it so as to deprive it of life. The mobile śūla apparently assumes this role, and the impalement of Kāttavarāyaṉ in the form of a lemon is a subterfuge (as is the substitution of a merchant for the demon on the stake). But Śiva is not deceived and, in his wrath, he condemns Śakti to be reborn on Earth as Māriyammaṉ.[61]

The recitation ends in the early morning of the tenth day when the procession enters the temple. Thus begins the big day of the tēr procession, that of the goddesses' victory chariot, which is immediately followed by the torture with needles and firewalk (this sequence reverses what one finds at Kṣetrapālapuram; above pp. 134 ff.). The goddess

[60]The term *kaḷuvaṭi*, which is more rare, is perhaps an interesting variation of kaḷumaram. The *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 805) gives the personified form *kaḷuvaṭiyaṉ* which it defines as follows: "A demon represented by a pole of the height of a man, on a raised platform beside a impaling stake." In the present context, in which the masculine ending is absent, would it not be reasonable to give *aṭi* its precise meaning of "base," the socle of the stake, *kaḷu-aṭi*, the socle with five steps having here its entire symbolic value by way of its particular form. On the other hand, the śūla functions as the real stake and its top evokes that of Pōtu Rāju. But this can simply be a confusion between kaḷuvaḍi and Kaḷuvuḍaiyaṉ, whom we encountered at Valattūr (above, pp. 129-30) in connection with Cinnaṉ. The term Kaḷuvaḍi is found elsewhere.

[61]We can only mention here a theme that must be developed on its own elsewhere. According to a probably late (?) version of the myth of Paraśurāma, that of the *Renukāmāhātmya* (ed. J. Gerson da Cunha, *The Sahyâdri Khanda* of the Skanda Purāṇa, Bombay 1877), Renukā is the incarnation of Pārvatī while Jamadagni is that of Śiva. They are the parents of Paraśurāma, the well-attested avatāra of Visnu. In our present account, the son of the goddess (not the god!) is Arjuna Kārtavīrya, the royal murderer of Jamadagni, in the form of the "demon" Kāttavarāyaṉ, while Paraśurāma and Jamadagni are simply absent. There are, of course, intermediary transformations to be taken into account to understand this substitution of the son. Perhaps the most significant occurs at the Paraśurāma temple in Pedhe (Konkan), where Renukā, from having been the decapitated princess in the epic-purānic myth, becomes herself the slayer of Arjuna Kārtavīrya. In the RM, Jamadagni's cow knows how to defend herself by producing weapons from her body, according to a theme known from the myth of Vasistha and Viśvāmitra, and she is sometimes confounded with Renukā, each being designated by the term *devī*. At the Tirunaṉriyūr temple, the cow remains the true victim in the form of the Brahman girl abducted by Kāttavarāyaṉ. The crown of martyrdom, like violence itself, always reverts in the last resort to the feminine element of the pantheon, who rids herself of all stain onto a male partner of inferior status.

The appearance of the term *śūla* as the Sanskrit equivalent of the Tamil *kaḷumaram* permits us to draw a precise new connection with the MBh. The epic provides, in effect, the first occurrences of sacrifice at the impalement stake, and the term employed is indeed *śūla* (otherwise an epic attribute of Rudra-Mahādeva). The rsi Aṇīmaṇḍavya is condemned to the impalement stake by Dharma himself (1.63.92-97a; 57.76b *var*- 81 and 1.107.11-16a; 101.10-14 *var*). Krsna and his friends from Dvārakā also threaten with the impalement stake anyone who infringes their interdiction against producing alcoholic beverages (16.1.29b-31a; 2.18-20a).

is placed on the chariot with her two customary bodyguards[62] and is then taken through all four streets of the rathavīthi of the village, receiving along the way the homage of local devotees and of the associated villages. When the tēr returns to the temple at the end of the morning, the three utsavamūrtis are placed in the maṇḍapa and the Aiyar Purohita comes again to perform a yajña before them. This is the same Brahman who ties the kaṅkaṇas to the goddess, the pūcāris, the bell (of the sanctuary), the uḍukkai (one of the drums that accompanies all the processions and most of the rites, but which, as a customary "weapon" of the goddess, symbolizes all ritual musical instruments), and a young banana tree, an unusual element in this context, but one that will soon reappear. The pūcāri then takes fire from the yajña in a copper tray and makes his way to the adjacent tīmidi site on the southern side of the temple enclosure. He is accompanied by the cāmiyāḍi in trance, who carries the banana tree. This small procession, preceded by all the musicians, first makes a pradakṣiṇa of the temple and then leaves in a southerly direction. To begin with, the possessed man (alias Kāttavarāyaṉ) plants the banana tree in the northeastern corner of the tīmidi site and the Brahman performs karpurārati to it. After the appearance in the sky of Garuḍa (the white kite, Viṣṇu's vehicle)—the *garuḍadarśana* or "vision of Garuḍa" (or "of the garuḍa")—the pūcāri deposits the fire at the middle of the site. Henceforth, the banana tree is called *Akkiṉikkāl* or *Akkiṉikampam* (Skt. *Agniskambha,* "post of the Fire" or "Fire post"). An Ācāri prepares the fire for the firewalkers while the procession returns to the temple, where devotees file past with offerings of coconuts, bananas, flour lamps, and silver ex-votos.[63] At about three in the afternoon, it is the turn of those who have vowed to walk on fire and/or pierce themselves with needles to receive kaṅkaṇas in the temple. At five o'clock, the pūcāri, the dharmakartās, and those with newly tied kaṅkaṇas proceed to the river with the śūla, the katti, the cekkumāndaḍi, and a metal pot (different from the first, which has remained in the sanctum near the mūlavar). After the bathing, the pot is decorated as a karagam to which the pūcāri offers worship. Devotees who have chosen to do so pierce themselves with needles—alaku here also—before the karagam; then the main dharmakartā places the karagam on the pūcāri's head. During this time, in the temple, the utsavamūrtis of the goddess and Kaṟuppu are decorated and then placed in front of the covered part of the fire site, while Kāttavarāyaṉ goes to the river in search of the karagam (his mother), and brings it (her) back in the midst of a large crowd. He then joins the two other utsavamūrtis in front of the fire, facing east. The śūla and katti are placed near the goddess's processional mūrti, and the pūcāri carrying the karagam

[62]One might ask about the doubling of the function of guardian of the goddess that one finds here in each of the temples having an impalement stake. From the mythical point of view, Kaṟuppu is almost absent and is rarely more than a stand-in for Kāttavarāyaṉ. He is, moreover, outside of his own geographical area: he is found more in the west and the south of Tamilnadu, where Kāttavarāyaṉ no longer appears. Cf. below, pp. 155 ff., 247 ff. Here, he makes it possible to divide the two weapons, the sacrificial sword or knife (*katti*) and the cekkumāndaḍi, in which one probably still finds a figure of the post. But the interpretation that can be made of this vīraṉ (see below) has probably contributed to making a place for him beside Kāttavarāyaṉ.

[63]Cf. above, p. 134, where māviḷakkus and ex-votos are also associated, which reinforces the hypothesis that these ex-votos, like the lamps, are sacrificial symbols and, when it is a matter of representations of parts of the body, of forms of ritual "torture." Regarding flour lamps and their symbolic relationship to the Vedic victim, see above, p. 89.

now begins the firewalk, immediately followed by the cāmiyāḍi armed with the cekkumāndaḍi. Behind them in an orderly line walk all those who received a kaṅkaṇa, those pierced with needles coming last. Both men and women participate without distinction in this ritual. The pūcāri, after having traversed the fire, dances before Māriyamman̲'s utsavamūrti, and then enters the temple where he deposits the karagam. While the katti and śūla are taken back to the temple, the three utsavamūrtis set out in procession through all the streets of the village (the role of the possessed man is not specified). When the utsavamūrtis have been returned to places near the fire, a terukkūttu or "street theater" begins and continues for three nights enacting diverse themes related neither to the goddess nor to Kāttavarāyan̲. On the first night, the utsavamūrtis are in attendance, after which they are placed in the temple on a platform in the maṇḍapa.

Finally, on the thirteenth day the three utsavamūrtis and the karagam from the fire-walk (without, it appears, a special name in this instance) proceed for the last time through the streets of the village, receiving a sprinkling of turmeric water from the inhabitants. They thereupon return to the temple. On a copper tray the pūcāri places the sprouts that have germinated in the sanctum around the first karagam, along with the soil in which they have grown, the margosa leaves, and the flowers with which the karagam has been decorated, as well as the kaṅkaṇas of all the participants. The priest then comes with this tray to join it with the karagam from the firewalk, which awaits outside borne by his assistant. They go to the tank near the temple and, following a pūjā to the karagam, everything is poured into the tank. Retained are only the tray and the pot, which one fills with water from the same tank for a final abhiṣeka of the mūlavar and the goddess's utsavamūrti. Prasāda is distributed after a solemn pūjā. The festival is over.

The ritual at Tirunan̲riyūr is composed of roughly the same elements as the rituals in Valattūr and Kṣetrapālapuram, although it resembles more closely that held in the latter, at least as regards the ritual tortures. The variants in the Kāttavarāyan̲ myth remain within the usual limits, as it is always a matter of saving the seducer-king and of transforming him into the devout guardian of Māriyamman̲. He was already the goddess's son at Puttūr (see above, p. 121). The duality of the karagams no doubt retains the same value as in the preceding case. The meaning of their opposition can, however, be clarified through the *aṅkurārpaṇa* rite (the offering of young sprouts) that accompanies it here, whereas this rite is absent in Kṣetrapālapuram (above, p. 133). This ritual sequence, found with variations in many contexts of collective or domestic festivals, is centered around the germination of seeds kept in the darkness of the sanctum of the temple or in another closed place. The whitish sprouts that result are often cast into the water with the other devalued "remains" of the festival; they are, however, sometimes distributed as prasāda. We are indeed in a sacrificial ambience in which the apparently unusable "remains" from the offerings are at the same time the guarantee of all renewal. The karagam decorated with margosa leaves and placed on the seedbed is thus the creative aspect of the deity presiding over the preservation of the world and watching over its rebirth, while the karagam from the firewalk is her warlike and destructive aspect that is necessary for renewing this same world, lacking which it would give way to irremediable chaos. The karagam of the interior, placed beside the mūlavar,

receives its entire meaning at the same time that it reveals it from the *garbhagṛha,* the matrix space that is the holy of holies in every Hindu temple.

Several elements centered around the firewalk deserve our attention. The first is the presence of the banana tree, whose destination after the ritual was not described to me. Let us wager that it is to be found among the "remains" of the festival that are cast into the neighboring tank at its end. Its name, Agniskambha, has a familiar ring: it is the name of the wooden post at the Draupadī temple in Kūttampākkam (above, p. 109). It will, moreover, soon be seen that the ritual for Vijayādaśamī—in diverse parts of Tamilnadu, but not in Tirunaṉṟiyūr and the surrounding area—associates a vaṉṉi branch and a young banana tree to represent the asura Vaṉṉi and commemorate his slaying by the goddess (below, p. 271). The association of the banana tree with the symbolism of the vaṉṉi may seem surprising, and it is not certain that one can entirely account for it. The banana tree generally has an auspicious and feminine connotation. It is thus striking that it is here placed in the northeastern corner, that of Īcāṉar according to the local informants. Normally this direction is ruled by Īśāna, the Lord, that is, a male deity[64] for whom a masculine symbol would be expected. But the trunk of a banana tree is conventionally compared to the thighs of a woman and not the male organ. As regards Agni, he normally presides in the southeast. On the other hand, although Tamil does not allow this nuance, it is perhaps pertinent to recall that in Sanskrit the vaṉṉi tree is the śamī (feminine) and the banana tree is the *kadalī* (feminine). Thus, in this corner where the goddess is sovereign in the present context, there may be a subtle combination of the masculine par excellence (the fire, or indeed also the pipal, which provides the araṇis for the sacrifice) and the feminine that is its matrix, namely the śamī or the Goddess (see below, pp. 288 ff.). The latter is here the mother of Kāttavarāyaṉ, who bears the cekkumāṇḍaḍi and is impaled on the śūla—one of these being the weapon and the other the instrument of torture that reproduce the post paradigm from which we set out (plates 61, 62). This combination is found again much more explicitly in the traversal of the fire, where goddess's karagam carried by her pūcāri is associated with the cekkumāṇḍaḍi held by the man who is possessed by Kāttavarāyaṉ. This time, there can be no hesitation in recognizing in the two symbols the goddess and her guardian of inferior rank to whom she herself gave birth. The husband-wife couple (suspected in the ritual at Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ; above, pp. 117 ff. and below, pp. 275 ff.) has simply been transformed into a mother-child pair that the collective consciousness can recognize as such: the son is normally subordinated to his mother—a matter of generation—whereas the subordination of the husband to his wife can only imply his inferior social status, an anomaly that must remain subconscious and thus by definition unspeakable. Nevertheless, a close symbolic unity must be maintained between the impalement stake, the śūla, the cekkumāṇḍaḍi, the banana tree, the possessed man, the Kāttavarāyaṉ whom he embodies, Agni who is present in the form of the banana tree-post, the fire for firewalking, and the needles under the skin. As a consequence, the Māriyammaṉ festival reproduces a structure analogous to that of Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ, but much more legible. The explicit presence of Agni also permits one to evoke the Draupadī of Kūttampākkam

[64]Cf. Reiniche 1981a, 46.

and her two posts (above, pp. 108 ff.) of analogous form: one being Agni, the goddess's brother, and the other Pōtta Rājā (partial heir of Pōtu Rāju), her brother-in-law. From the post-god of Āndhra to the impalement stake with hooks of Māriyamman̲, the worlds have hardly been changed. The buffalo always appears to be forgotten, but one will see it reappear where it was not expected. As for Kāttavarāyan̲, his association with the impalement stake, which the story he inherits from the classical myth would seem to fully justify, is now doubled by an identification or symbolic link with fire. In fact, one could have suspected as much from the Puttūr temple onward, since the festival of Māriyamman̲, the impaled Kāttavarāyan̲'s mother, included a firewalk. One is of course far from the classical myth in which Arjuna Kārtavīrya is the first victim of Paraśurāma, who will destroy all princes of the Earth. But one must not forget that this total destruction of the world is precisely what the fire of the firewalk symbolizes, itself the ritualization of the fire of war that, in the epic, is conducted by the incarnation of Agni. In fact, the mythico-ritual web woven around Kāttavarāyan̲ develops the symbolic implications of the classical myth, and the apparently wild and indefinitely drawn out nocturnal narration follows a clearly demarcated course.

It remains to consider the garuḍa, whose appearance in the sky gives the signal to prepare the fire for the firewalk. This detail is mysterious, and one would obviously like to know more precisely the concrete modalities of its annual occurrence. We can do little more than set a few landmarks and be prepared to abandon them should they be invalidated by new facts. First, it is quite certain that villagers know of the association between Garuḍa and Viṣṇu. Locally, if Māriyamman̲ is considered to be an incarnation of Pārvatī, she is at the same time at least implicitly Viṣṇu's sister. It is the same situation for Paccaivāl̲iyamman̲, who summons her brother to help against the seven vīras and sees him assume the form of the seven munis. And Viṣṇu is likewise present in the form of Kṛṣṇa in the Draupadī cult. If Māriyamman̲ can remind us that she has been Reṇukā in the classical myth, it is also not surprising to find that Garuḍa might be a reminder of Viṣṇu's avatāra as Paraśurāma. The association within the mythico-ritual complex formed around the Goddess, Viṣṇu, and Śiva is still entirely in line with the conception of the most classical Hinduism, that of the epic, which logically (and probably historically?) precedes any sectarianism. However, why do we have Garuḍa here rather than a form of Viṣṇu closer to man? At this point one should be careful regarding the Sanskrit designation of this ritual moment: *garuḍadarśana*.[65] What is a garuḍa for the villagers of Tirunan̲riyūr? If they know of its mythical link with Viṣṇu, do they identify it with a clearly determined bird? One must no doubt answer yes: it is indeed a garuḍa that is awaited between the moment the banana tree is planted—evoking from afar the yūpa consecrated to Viṣṇu—and the moment when the tīmidi fire is established. Furthermore, the flight of a white kite in the sky is not a rarity in this region and one would indeed like to believe that the appearance of this bird is really awaited as a sign, for example, of the benediction of Viṣṇu. But one can hardly dismiss the hypothesis that this terminology draws on a play of symbolic substitutes and approxi-

[65]Cf. *Tamil Lexicon,* 754, s.v. karuṭaricaṉam; this seems to be a customary act of praying when a garuda is seen, but the expression is then *karuṭapaṭciyaikkaṇṭu vaṇaṅkukai*.

mations of the type that so often engages Hindu thought, from every position in the social hierarchy and since the earliest literatures. Could not the particular form in which Viṣṇu (when he is the deity in question) is awaited be connected with the partial homophony between *kaḻu*, the impalement post, and *kaḻuku*, the eagle or vulture? We have already seen that at Valattūr (above, p. 130) the kaḻugu intervenes in the myth to tear out the eyes of the merchant impaled in place of Kāttavarāyaṉ, and to justify the name taken by the torture of Kāḻuvuḍaiyāṉ, "Lord of the impalement stake." In Tirunaṉṟiyūr, Kāttavarāyaṉ's entanglements with the kaḻu are more complex and entail the impalement stake's doubling into the kaḻu and the śūla, but also its transformation into an auspicious banana tree. Would the garuḍa who comes to bless the enterprise of Kāttavarāyaṉ, guardian of the goddess, through the ordeal by fire then not be the auspicious substitute for the odious kaḻugu? The passage from the torn out *eyes* to the propitious *vision* is only made because the stupid merchant took the precious Kāttavarāyaṉ's place.

c. Impalement Stakes in Maṟavar Country, Ramnad District

Several problems remain in abeyance regarding this impalement stake with hooks from Tanjavur District and the godling from Āndhra, should one wish to stress the semantic and formal continuity between them: notably the displacement of the goddess whom they serve from the boundary to the center of the agglomeration, and the infrequency, indeed the total disappearance, of blood sacrifice—not to speak of the buffalo sacrifice, which is simply absent—and its replacement by other forms of ritual torture of the votive type.[66] But perhaps we have given our analysis a certain shape by deciding to travel the country from north to south. If we had set out from the far south of the east coast—the same coast we have scarcely left around Tanjavur—that is, had we set out from Ramnad District, which is dominated by the great pilgrimage center of Rāmeśvaram and is also the territory of a Maṟavar kingdom in which the Maṟavars remain the main landowners, we would certainly not have had the same ideas in mind when we approached the Māriyammaṉ temples along the Kāverī. Nonetheless, in Ramnad too one finds impalement stakes whose structural elements recall those from around Tanjavur, and do not allow one to posit a radical separation between them. Unfortunately, the study undertaken in this part of the "field" was done too rapidly and in very unfavorable conditions.[67] Thus one can only open the dossier here, not instruct; but it would be a pity, even from a purely artistic point of view, to pass over this new variant in silence. In any case, one must keep in mind that the ensemble of facts presented in this work does not form a closed totality, but only the aggregate of what has been discovered up to now and, upon analysis, been deemed pertinent. The ensemble

[66]It is no doubt necessary, in effect, to distinguish cases in which ritual torture is inflicted on a specific person, of high or low caste according to location, by hereditary "right," and those in which the torture is votive and concerns an indeterminate number of persons varying from year to year. We will see that this distinction can be meaningful in relation to the goddess.

[67]I discovered one of the sites in 1980 during a visit to Rāmanāthapuram for the Vijayādaśamī festival. Others were found by M.-L. Reiniche in 1981, during a time when the region was racked by serious tensions between landowning castes and "untouchables."

therefore remains open, while the set of facts that we now consider only calls for further investigation.[68]

The five sites itemized in Ramnad represent at best, once again, only a sample of what this region possesses, but they manifest a certain coherence that cannot be illusory, irrespective of the limitations of the study. They are enumerated here in the order that one finds them along the road: first, the road from Madurai to Rāmanāthapuram and Rāmeśvaram; then a secondary route that follows the coast in a southerly direction, departing from the main Madurai-Rāmanāthapuram road a little before Rāmanāthapuram. The fifth and last site to be mentioned is very near the border separating Ramnad and Tirunelveli Districts.

In Mēlaperuṅkarai, there is first a small shrine north of the road consecrated to the guardian of the road, Cālaiyuḍaiyār (?) or Cōṇaiyā: a simple platform surrounded by three low walls that would go unnoticed were it not provided with two stone posts each set in a brickwork socle and ending in a cruciform motif of sculpted *Acacia arabica* wood surmounted by a central impalement stake fashioned of the same wood (plates 63, 64). The stone shaft is alternately of square and octagonal sections and its height is roughly that of a man. The sanctuary belongs to the village, its pūcāri is a Maṟavar, and Cōṇaiyā is the kuladevam, the lineage deity of some Maṟavars in the village. The village is situated south of the road and its western boundary is formed by a tank, belonging to the village, whose bank is "guarded" by a group of small shrines around an Aiyaṉār. A Kaṟuppaiyaṉ flanking Aiyaṉār to the south is obviously his guardian.[69] But the sanctuary farthest from the bank faces east, contrary to Aiyaṉār, and is consecrated to Muṉiyappaṉ. It is a raised platform with five steps that is provided simply with a low wall at the back with a recess for a lamp. What makes it noteworthy are the banyan, in the shade of which it is found, and the large post with impalement stake, similar to those alongside the road but more ornate at the top and taking up motifs of late Vijayanagar style (plate 65). The impalement stake is roughly on the banyan's axis (one would like to say that they must have the same age), both of which are, on the contrary, out of line in relation to Muṉiyappaṉ. Similarly, the two impalement stakes on the side of the road were not on the axis of Cōṇaiyā. The cruciform element fashioned of acacia wood at the base of the impalement stake has four arms prolonged by a small plank. Each "pendentive" of the cross has a hook at its base. If the posts with impalement stakes are here generally termed *kaṟuvaḍi*—which puts us on familiar ground—the one in the village is called Cōṇaiyā, and thus constitutes a replica of the guardian deity of the road. The festival has not taken place for some twenty years, but it is still known to have included this group of small temples (which are, moreover, boundary temples), and to

[68]Certain variants will also be found elsewhere, as a result of falling more within the "classical" domain, that is, the pan-Indian or regional, and no longer that of the local and village. At the other end, I did not want take up the reputedly tribal domain (cf. for example Fischer and Shah 1973), even if one no longer believes in a neat division between what is Hindu and what is tribal, or between "brahmanic" Hinduism and "popular" Hinduism (cf. Reiniche 1981b).

[69]Aiyaṉār faces west towards the tank that is on the western boundary of the village. But apart from this spatial inversion, the position of Kaṟuppu in relation to Aiyaṉār replicates that of Candikeśvara in relation to Śiva: he is turned toward the holy of holies and is on the same level.

have involved rites of possession and sacrifices of three reddish-brown goats or rams. No one could, or wanted to, specify the role of the impalement stakes which, however, constitute an important architectural and sculptural element of the whole.

One gets the same general impression at Landaikaruṅkulam, located a few kilometers from Rāmanāthapuram alongside the road. There the important element lies in two posts with impalement stakes of the same type as the preceding, but made entirely of wood. The square-sectioned shaft is embellished with decorative (but is a lotus ever purely decorative in India?) or symbolic reliefs, but the arms of the horizontal cross bear no trace of hooks. The post farthest from the small temple is on its axis; the nearest one is out of line toward the south. It is, however, the latter that bears on its face a nameless vīraṉ with the side-chignon characteristic of his asuric status and armed with a sword and cekkumāndaḍi such as we found on the banks of the Kāverī apportioned between Kaṟuppu and Kāttavarāyaṉ. The sanctuary (plate 66), a small cubical construction open to the east, is devoid of any representation; it is consecrated to Cālaikkaraiyāṉ, "He who is on the side of the road." It is a place of worship for Paḷḷars, one of the very lowest Tamil castes, who have a hamlet nearby and supply the temple with a priest from their own community. This group of families apparently came from Ceyyālūr and brought a small quantity of soil from the temple there to build this one. On either side of the impalement stakes are distributed small unoccupied platforms consecrated to the goddesses Kālī, Pēcci, and Rākkāyi (= Rākṣasī). They are in a subordinate position and the god on the side of the road seems to be identified with Śiva, or at least with a form of Śiva, since his sanctuary is a *Civaṉkuṭam*, a "receptacle of Śiva" (?), like the one from which he emigrated. Yet he is not a very "orthodox" Śiva, and Kālī here is no more so insofar as she seems to be on the same plane as Pēcciyammaṉ and Rākṣasī, two demonesses. The annual festival takes place on the day of the new moon of Cittirai. There is certainly at least one blood sacrifice, but the element of the cult that retains the attention of the Paḷḷars present—including the priest—is the dance the latter performs in a state of trance *on* the cross of the post that lies on the axis of the main shrine (plate 67). One can thus sketch out a differentiation of the two posts with the help of the motifs sculpted on their lower parts. They have in common their general form and the socle with three steps upon which they are raised. But the post nearest the temple, the one that represents the vīraṉ on its eastern face and no doubt corresponds to the guardian of the god, bears sculpted on its northern and southern sides an arivāḷ, the sacrificial knife most customarily used for decapitating goats (plate 68). On the upper part of the shaft of this post, at two-thirds its height, it also has a square section interrupted horizontally by a round double ring with a groove that calls to mind the ring on Pōtu Rāju, or on stone posts between the shaft and the upper knob. We have already noted that it is not on the axis of the shrine. It would therefore not be overly venturesome to conjecture that it is this post that receives the blood sacrifice, when there is one.[70] The worship of the main deity would once again take place by way of that of its guardian. As for the post where the possessed man dances, the only symbol it bears is a bottle (of alcohol!) on its

[70]The hamlet is very poor and it is likely that the silence around the blood sacrifice results from the inability to offer annually a victim as large as a goat. It was seen in Āndhra that entire villages offered a buffalo only in the case of public calamity.

eastern face (plate 69), of which one is only told that the priest drinks alcohol to enter a trance and dance on the impalement stake. No mythical element locally justifies this dance, but coming from the Māriyamman̲ temples around Tanjavur, the observer is in a position to reconstruct it. Does the dance on the stake not also evoke the possessed Mahār (above, p. 29) who, during the festival of the goddess (Marīāī!) of the Mahār quarter of Ṣoḷāpur, dances on the back of a buffalo before its immolation, embodying at the same time the goddess and the buffalo-demon? Here the goddess is absent and that is the great novelty and at the same time the difficulty presented by this variant of the impalement stake, to which we shall return.

Following the itinerary indicated, this time on the secondary road leading south, near the village of Idampāḍal, one finds between the road and its tank a group of small sanctuaries having three ka̲lumarams (one of which has fallen to the ground), and among them a temple dedicated to Āṇḍakkālamman̲. Whatever the interpretation of the origin of this name, it is assuredly a question of a Kālī as goddess of the boundary, facing north as is customary in the region, but also facing the tank. As for the ka̲lumarams, all made of wood, they are aligned in front of the shrine of Vaḍakaraiyān̲ or Vaḍakaraicāmi (represented by three triśūlas), "the god of the northern bank." The name is surprising: the temple is oriented toward the east and is located on the southern bank of the tank. Somewhat farther to the east, a small Piḷḷaiyār (Gaṇapati) temple also opens to the east. The site is in bad condition and the reason for this is easily understood. Not far off, on the other side of the road, are the ruins of a fortified building, no doubt an old "palace," next to which stands the samādhi-temple of the former rāja. The temples belong not to the village but to a Ma̲ṟavar who still bears the title of rāja; he is the grandson of the rāja of the samādhi. If the Ma̲ṟavar keeps his position as landowner, he has manifestly lost a good part of his fortune (as zamindar) and can no longer lead the royal lifestyle of his grandfather, or maintain the cultic complex associated with the tank. The festival, no longer held, took place on the new moon of Māsi (end of February) and the possessed priest mounted the central ka̲lumaram to respond to questions from the people. The oracular function seems to have taken the place of the dance, but the two are not mutually exclusive and both require trance. As for this post (plate 70), apart from the influence of the late Vijayanagar style that accords well enough to the presence of a local rāja, there is the elaborate form of the stake properly speaking that is reminiscent, for example, of the ka̲lumaram in Puttūr (plates 52, 53 and above, p. 121) or the Pōtu Rāju of Mallavaram (plate 4 and above, p. 20). I have no information about the cult of the neighboring Kālī or its link with Vaḍakaraicāmi, but it is more than likely that they were connected and the goddess probably continues to receive a minimum of worship in connection with the grāma-devatās of the place. The limitations of this inquiry do not allow me to say more on this point.

Somewhat farther south on the same road, at the village of Kaḍugucandaicattiram, one finds a ka̲lumaram with a stone shaft in front of a Ka̲ṟuppucāmi temple. The cruciform top is provided with a wooden impalement stake that is secured by a quite heavy iron framework. From the cross's four arms are suspended small chains ending in hooks onto which lemons are impaled (plate 71). Here, the double disposition of the impalement stake and hook-swinging is very clear and shows how these are two varia-

tions of one and the same torture: lemons are impaled on both the point of the stake and the hooks, each element again becoming functional in the animal sacrifice. The priest is a barber, but it is not easy to know whether the temple belongs to the Barber caste or to the village: as we have already seen, sometimes it is impossible to decide the extent to which the deity of a caste linked to the quarter where it dwells might have come to occupy a key position in the village space (for example, see above, p. 115). Karuppu, whom one finds in the position of a guardian of Māriyamman, or also indeed of Aiyanār (notably in Ramnad), is here in turn provided with a guardian of his own. The torture post has on its four sides a small vīran in bas-relief who bears an arivāl and a cekkumāndaḍi: a good example of the indefinite hierarchization from the bottom up that Hindu society often provokes, either in its own structure or on the religious plane. The sanctuary, open to the east, includes in the open air and to the northeast of the entrance a goddess with a child, probably Pēcciyamman, whom one finds elsewhere in a position that subordinates her to Māriyamman. In the entire Ramnad region, what one comes across is not the disappearance of the "goddess function" as such, but its degradation relative to the profit of male divinities who are elsewhere reputed to be inferior. But it is difficult to draw general conclusions in the absence of a more extensive study. Nonetheless, we can affirm that the "demon function" increasingly marks the countryside,[71] and that our posts bear witness to it: they are what attracts attention, whereas the Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra goes easily unnoticed. They are never independent of a given shrine, for which they are at the same time guardians and intermediaries in blood sacrifices, etc. The Karuppu temple here is no exception, but the impalement stake is situated on its axis because the sight of blood does not offend him. He has, therefore, not changed in "nature," but his relations with other deities have been transformed. At the time of the biennial Cittirai festival, cocks are hung by the neck from hooks on the chains: a new form of immolation in which the symbolic post again finds a ritual function. In addition, one goat (for the collective?) or several (votive?) are impaled on the stake at neck-level and immediately removed. It is not said whether this treatment entails their death, but that would appear to be implied. The sacrifices are performed by the priest in a state of trance, and a singer who accompanies himself on the musical bow (in *villupāṭṭu* style) recounts the god's story. A final detail: between the kalumaram and the Karuppu sanctuary, a dog is represented in the position of the vehicle-devotee common in large bhakti temples. This does not seem to be current in the Tamil countryside. If one finds some vīras with a dog around Tanjavur, one should not lay undue stress on it, since they could be a legacy of domination by the Marāṭhas, whose god Khaṇḍobā is invariably associated with dogs. Whatever may be their significance in that context, it would be hazardous to transpose it into Ramnad where the sacrificial post recovers the primary function that it lacks in Mahārāṣṭra. For the moment we come up against an opaque element that we will try to clarify in what follows, even if it remains erratic in this region.[72]

[71]See below, pp. 237 ff., for the situation in Tirunelveli, and pp. 247 ff. regarding a few facts for the interpretation of Karuppu.

[72]See below, pp. 155 ff., on the ritual sequence characteristic of the buffalo sacrifice in a part of Kongunad, and pp. 247 ff. on Karuppu.

I will only mention a fifth site on the same southern road near Narippaiyūr, because it clearly marks the transition between Ramnad and Tirunelveli Districts, whose boundary is only a few kilometers away. A massive stone kaḷumaram is surmounted by a horizontal iron cross supported by a framework of the same metal. All aesthetic features have disappeared, no doubt at the same time as the symbolic connotations. But the novelty is that here the kaḷumaram is installed in front of an absolutely anonymous *pīṭam* (from Skt. *pīṭha*). The post is absent from the Tirunelveli countryside, while the *pīḍam* there is the characteristic element, standing for the little sanctuary of an inferior divinity itself as well as for its guardian.

d. Sifting Hypotheses on Impalement Posts in Tanjavur and Ramnad

What conclusion should one draw from the presence, in a relatively well demarcated area, of a form of the torture post that is clearly related to those we have encountered and analyzed so far, but which is treated differently? In one sense, this particularly arid region of India, the chosen land of the Maṟavars, might seem peripheral and apt to receive only distant and distorted echoes of a theme well anchored in "higher" Hinduism, but one that has already become "popular" in each of its regional variants. That, however, would mean giving short shrift to the proximity, on the one hand, of Rāmeśvaram (of which Ramnad's Maṟavar kings held themselves to be the "guardians" as "masters of the causeway" between India and Sri Lanka), and, on the other, of Madurai, as well as of Tirucchendūr and even Kanyākumārī in the south, with their throngs of pilgrims and the inevitable proliferation of Brahmans of all types without whom an Indian *tīrtha* would not be worth the name. Ramnad's kaḷumarams are situated on lines of communication that doubtlessly existed long before the construction of modern roads.[73] One must thus abandon a simple diffusionist hypothesis that would posit the waning of age-old traditions, cut off from their deep roots, on the Coromandel coast. Conversely, it might be tempting to consider these beautiful posts for all to see as "originals," and as the source of those that, farther north, become more modest and less explicit. Not only is the blood sacrifice given evident prominence, but it is directly related to the post. The latter no longer has the mythical function of punishing the demon guardian of the goddess (Kāttavarāyaṉ), or, as in Āndhra, of representing the victim of this punishment (the Buffalo); rather, it is the torture post itself. That, however, is to go much further than the Vedic post ever did, which at most served to tether the victim at the moment of its immolation.[74] Nothing in the ritual or symbolism of the yūpa would allow one to suppose that it could formerly have been directly the instrument of putting to death: an impalement stake or its derivative, the hook for hook-swinging, which one finds together in Ramnad. From this vantage point, one could take up once again, from another end of the map of India, the hypothesis of the Indo-German team that worked on Orissa:[75] the kaḷumaram would have issued from the regional culture of Ramnad, a culture dominated by seminomads such as the Maṟavars indeed were, and who, to be sure, still hold

[73]Cf. Stein 1980, 150 and map IV.1.
[74]Schmidt 1973.
[75]Eschmann, Kulke, and Tripathi 1978.

the hinterland if not the great pilgrimage places. Following this line of thought, one might further note that, in distinction from the Jagannātha of Purī, the Ramnad post was not significantly promoted while colonizing the north, since it is still on the Kāverī linked to a so-called popular goddess and loses all trace of a hook or lethal point as the distance from the "real" post increases. The only temporary gain would be in its shifting from the periphery to the center of the agglomeration in Tanjavur District, and an attenuation of the importance of blood sacrifice, which goes so far as to disappear before certain Māriyamman temples. Let us push a little farther: when one finds it again in Orissa among royal goddesses, tribes, or on the gopuram of the Liṅgarāja temple at Bhubaneswar (not to mention that of the very pure Jagannātha), it is no more than a distant and scarcely recognizable echo of the Ramnad post. It is, in effect, necessary to follow the hypothesis to its conclusion, for even if the analysis carried out so far is abolished, it remains permissible to follow this post outside Orissa to its traces and variants and arrive at Ramnad as the region that would furnish a functional, explicit, and simple model that would be as barbaric as one could wish. Of course, I push the simplistic reasoning to the absurd only so as not to have to respond to it.

With regard to these two hypotheses, what we have to offer has no higher epistemological status. It is again only an hypothesis, but one that attempts to retain a body of semantic and formally congruent facts. We can hope to support it by continuing the course launched and nourishing it with new facts that it clarifies. From north to south on the itinerary we have followed, with the excursion to the western Deccan, the post as god, demon, or instrument of torture is invariably associated with sacrificial death, as was the Vedic yūpa before it. Its regional transformations, even when they modify its function and transfer it, for example, from myth to rite, or from the symbolic to the effective, retain the same semantic horizon. It is this, in particular, that has allowed us to recognize it not only as the descendant of the yūpa, but also of the sacrificial fire, which makes of the victim an oblation to the gods and transfigures it by this act of deliverance. On the other hand, all along the coast the post is associated with a goddess for whom it is the guardian, sometimes at the boundary, sometimes at the center. In those places where animal victims tend to disappear, they are relieved by the ritual tortures of devotees in which the fire and the post, the tīmidi and the kaḷumaram with all its variants, combine.

In Ramnad, the element of fire seems to disappear from its symbolism.[76] It remains a question why the kaḷumaram of Muṉiyappaṉ in Mēlaperuṅkarai is located on the axis of a banyan, and what this banyan might mean. But this arrangement is the only one of its kind among the cases reported. On the other hand, it is perhaps possible to disclose new aspects of Vedic symbolism in this type of kaḷumaram, the first of which would be its height, of the same measure as the Vedic post, roughly the height of a man. Are we to view this as a matter of pure chance, or see in it a regional utilization of a pan-Indian Vedic fact? I will not attempt any further proof for lack of evidence collected in the field, but it is tempting to see here the impact of brahmanic knowledge concerning

[76]It will be recalled that the Maṟavars also have a relation to fire and to the vaṉṉi tree (see above, p. 116). There is a dissociation of the elements of the symbol to the advantage of the Maṟavars, elevated through their accession to landed property and above all to royalty.

animal sacrifice on popular religion henceforth specialized in blood rites, an impact renewed, rethought—digested, as it were, with what that implies for unconscious collective processes—through contact with surrounding brahmanism. Still more revealing might be an attentive consideration of the little cruciform platform surmounting the post's shaft, into which the impalement stake is inserted. When seen in the Kāverī valley, it went unquestioned since we lacked information regarding its exact mythic and ritual role. In fact, it was indissociable there from the impalement post properly speaking, and constituted with it a symbolic whole that transformed the kaṉumaram in Puttūr, or even the stone post of Ellaiyammaṉ or other boundary goddesses. In Ramnad it functions both as a hook-swinging device with its chains and hooks[77]—thus as a sacrificial instrument replicating the impalement stake—and as a platform upon which the possessed man dances and/or pronounces oracles. The dance is one of victory over the demon, and the prophecy must always be reassuring, promising the protection of the deity who has just received satisfaction through worship: in either case, it is the place from which desired prosperity announces itself, the fruit granted from the sacrifice. It is perhaps from there that one must set out to discover the link with the Vedic ancestor, the mysterious mortar-shaped caṣāla that bears all the promises of the yūpa (above, pp. 37-40 and n. 10). In other words, the kaṉumaram's cross would be a new interpretation of the ring on the stone post or Pōtu Rāju that connects the shaft with the upper knob, or again, a more or less direct plastic transformation of the caṣāla that permits its ritual utilization in a homologous sacrificial context, that of the blood sacrifice.

This transition may, of course, seem initially to be forced, but it is in one sense easier to move from the square or octagonal caṣāla (depending upon the shape chosen for the shaft section), with its spatial symbolism, to the horizontal cross of the kaṉumaram, itself pointed toward the four directions, than from the round ring of the equally rounded stone post to the cross oriented in space. This interpretation found in Ramnad could have made its way there underground—that is, without having left traces in the course of history—but it may be compared with the stone yūpas commemorative of Vedic sacrifices going back to the first centuries of our era that have been found in north India around Mathurā:[78] they all stylize the post by giving it more sides than authorized in the texts for the wooden post (always a multiple of eight), whereas their caṣāla is always square. Closer to the kaṉumarams of Ramnad in space and time, we have seen (above, pp. 108, 111 n. 5, and plates 41, 42) a post with a squared caṣāla before Draupadī. In the case of the Tindivanam post, it is possible to see a transposed caṣāla in the round double ring at the base of the upper knob. In this case, there is thus an attempt to translate the curved form of the caṣāla, and it is perhaps this which is found again at Landaikaruṅkulam in the double ring of the wooden post a little below the cross-shaped platform (above, p. 147 and plate 68). As for as the post of Ammacciyār (above, p. 111, n. 5), the square section of its shaft gives way to an octagonal section at the height of what represents the caṣāla. In all of these variations, it is a

[77]The chains only appear in Kaḍugucandaicattiram in front of Kaṉuppu, but there are rings beneath the cross at Mēlaperuṅkarai that must also have had chains, and one might suppose that others have disappeared, given the dilapidation of several of the kaṉumarams.

[78]Cf. Vogel 1910-11; Chhabra 1947 and plate 16; and above, p. 38, n. 10.

matter of posts whose position (before Draupadī or Ammacciyār, or in front of the guardian deity of the road) is less tied to a tradition fixed in detail, and the interpretation of the caṣāla is less subject to stereotype. This is no doubt one of the elements of the yūpa that has always best lent itself to variations, always in connection with the very rich symbolism of the caṣāla codified by the texts. Finally, the last argument: if the kaḷumaram's cross is a transformation of the caṣāla, the impalement stake properly speaking emerges as the tenon over which the caṣāla was slipped, that is, like the pestle of the mortar to which Schwab assimilated the curved form of the caṣāla; or better, like the summit of the post/phallus that pierces the caṣāla that is woman/Earth, fecund but wounded. Where blood sacrifice becomes the norm, the symbol becomes clearer.

Were this hypothesis to be retained, the kaḷumaram in Ramnad would become more readable, more explicit than the one on the banks of the Kāverī; from this vantage point, the transformation from the one into the other would have taken place in a south-north direction rather than the opposite. But the purely symbolic and, from the plastic point of view, residual kaḷumaram of Māriyammaṉ could not have found its full significance without the clarification it received from the north. In particular, how else could we have understood its association with the firewalk and needles under the skin without reference to the double symbolic charge of Pōtu Rāju? One thus sees that the merely diffusionist schema complicates itself singularly; and correlatively, the active ubiquity of Vedic symbolism affirms itself in counterpoint to its "popular" and modern variants.

What is to be said now regarding the goddess's disappearance as recipient of the sacrifice offered mythically on the impalement stake at the moment when the stake itself rediscovers a precise ritual function in relation to the blood sacrifice? Knowing what we do of the goddess's apparent lack of appetite for animal victims directly offered to her, or even her repugnance at the sight of blood,[79] one might immediately perceive a relation between the absence of the goddess at the boundary and the more spectacular character of the immolation via the kaḷumaram. The general process of separation and mediation that is seen to be at work in goddess temples (those in Āndhra as well as those to Māriyammaṉ) even seems to a certain extent to reproduce itself in front of those demon-gods who are provided with kaḷumarams when the latter are not on the axis of the sanctuary that they serve: indeed, the idea is that the sacrifice is offered to the demon-deity who inhabits the kaḷumaram, but by way of his being a "guardian," and thus a demon who is inferior. For we have to take into account a key element that is lacking in this part of our study: all the impalement stakes encountered by chance along the road are peripheral in relation to the settlements (including the one at Mēlaperuṅ-karai, where the village's impalement stake is in fact included in the cultic complex on the bank of the tank on the village's western boundary; above, p. 146). The exploration has also remained incomplete in that we did not learn whether there was a deity in a central position in these settlements; we cannot even affirm that Māriyammaṉ is absent.

[79]No doubt with nuances: for example, the Māriyammaṉ in Valattūr, in the hands of Kaḷḷars, has fewer objections to goat offerings than the one in Kṣetrapālapuram. One would expect so there, even though the susceptibilities of the goddess would always be respected to a certain extent. In the course of descriptions, one could observe that the modes of mediation between the deity and the victim are multiple and that they rarely if ever have contact.

On the other hand, divinities with proper names—ones who do not reduce themselves to a function as guardians of a given place, road, or reservoir—are known to us: around Tanjavur, Karuppu is invariably present near Māriyamman with Kāttavarāyan. The latter does not appear in Ramnad, but once, at least, it is Karuppu himself who has the impalement stake, and even the most functional impalement stake that we have encountered (above, pp. 148-49). At another site (above, p. 146), he subordinates himself to Aiyanār—whom we have seen elsewhere to be associated with Māriyamman in her annual festival as a grāmadevatā. It is then Muniyappan who receives the impalement stake, but erected a little aside in relation to his small open-air shrine and placed on the axis of a banyan: a revealing detail that could help to situate this Muniyappan.

One meets Muniyappan frequently in the Tamil countryside if one looks for him there, since he is characterized by the unpretentiousness of his sanctuaries. I saw in the middle of Chennai a Muniyappan represented by a simple brick in the shade of a tree. There is, however, a quite obvious passage from the brick to the small platform in Mēlaperuṅkarai, upon which we shall place no great emphasis, since the brick is no more proper to Muniyappan than the platform: in Tamil, the latter is called *vēṭikai,* from Sanskrit *vedikā,* itself derived from *vedi,* the Vedic sacrificial altar that symbolizes the entire Earth.[80] The Muniyappan in Mēlaperuṅkarai is included in the complex of boundary deities who watch over both the village and the tank.

It is unfortunately impossible today, after a long interruption of the Mēlaperuṅkarai festival, to know what took place at Muniyappan's sanctuary there in connection with its kaḷumaram. On this subject, however, one might recall the seven munis, one of whom, Vāḷumuni, is especially important. They were brought forth by Viṣṇu to come to the aid of his sister, the goddess Paccaivāḷiyamman. The munis undertake to slay the seven vīras who assail the goddess, and the large painted earthenware figures representing them (above, p. 117 and plates 44-46) share among themselves royal (tiara, horse, weapon) and ascetic (chignon) or brahmanic (Veda in the hand) features.[81] Vāḷumuni, at least, has his right foot positioned on the severed head of his asuric victim. But they receive, as does the goddess, a purely vegetarian cult, the only offerings of meat and alcohol going to the vīran who incarnates the eponymous ancestor of the Vanniyars. This could serve to explain that the vegetarianism of the munis would once again be found in a detour via the kaḷumaram, by way of which the animal offering to Muniyappan would probably have been made. This is so to the extent that it is justifiable to link these deities accompanied by an impalement stake with the local goddess who delegates her warrior functions to them. The only novelty would be the spatial separation between the goddess and her attendants. But there could also be another: in the far south, Karuppu is generally connected with Aiyanār, as in our

[80]It is obviously this same symbolism that is at work in the brick upon which the god Vithobā stands in Mahārāstra.

[81]Cf. Biardeau 1967-68. In fact, this "mixture of varnas" presented by the munis has its counterpart in the popular understanding of the role of Paraśurāma near Renukā: it is an element that contributes to the isomorphism between the mythico-ritual groups of Paccaivāḷiyamman and Renukā-Māriyamman. But Jamadagni, Renukā's husband and father of Paraśurāma, is already an example of this mixture. See below, pp. 155 ff.

example from Mēlaperuṅkarai. This could then be an additional mediation in the chain of delegations of power to demon-foes, and also in the series of meat offerings, since Aiyaṉār is a confirmed vegetarian.

We shall be wary of drawing a conclusion in the absence of more complete information. Let it suffice for now to observe that the same functions are in place in the village and that the same vegetarian/meat eating dichotomy continues to be at play, even in a context where vegetarian castes are more or less absent. Vegetarianism testifies everywhere to a veiled presence of brahmanic, and even ascetic, values.

3. Māriyamman, Her Post-Husband, and Other Avatars of the Buffalo in Kongunad

Geographically, the link is not obvious between the different variants of the post on the eastern coast and the post found with Māriyamman in Kongunad, either permanently erected in front of her sanctuary, or raised there temporarily at the time of the annual festival. Nor, for that matter, is the link any more obvious between the coastal posts and the double stone post that serves in the vicinity of Dhārāpuram for buffalo sacrifices to boundary goddesses.[82] In particular, we have until now omitted any consideration of the most well-known Māriyamman temple, that of Samayapuram near Tiruchirapalli, which could represent an important landmark on the way from Tanjavur to Kongunad. This temple is not only provided with gurukkaḷ priests, but is under the control of the devasthāna of the Vaiṣṇava Śrīraṅgam temple. This is as much as to say that it is "normalized" and that its cult has lost in local particularities what it has gained in brahmanical status. We will soon refer to it thanks to one of its subsidiary shrines. But there again, one cannot speak of a significant geographical landmark. Simple diffusion can never suffice to account for the spatial expansion of the central theme, and we shall

[82]For Māriyamman in Kongunad, I draw on Beck 1981, which will provide an additional example of the ritual under study. But to give chance its proper due, I must acknowledge that the immediate object of my two visits to eastern Kongunad, in 1975 and 1981, was neither the post pursued here, nor Māriyamman, nor even the buffalo sacrifice. In 1975, setting out from Paḻaṉi (Madurai Dt.) with its large Subrahmaṇya pilgrimage center, I made a detour through the region of Dhārāpuram (*Tārāpuram*), which abounds in sites connected with the fourth book of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Virāṭaparvan*. There, at all the "epic sites," I discovered double stone posts associated with boundary goddesses and their buffalo sacrifices. In 1981, in preparation for a future study especially of Subrahmaṇya, I planned an extensive study of the double temples to Subrahmaṇya (on a hilltop) and to Śiva (usually known as Kailāsanātha) at the foot of the same hill. These double temples, which had been brought to my attention by F. L'Hernault (see also L'Hernault 1984), further caught my attention by the very particular posts that fronted them, the full form of which called to mind Pōtu Rāju, this time in the classical register and without direct relation to a real blood sacrifice, should the latter even exist. However, the first sites to be visited, simple villages or small market towns at the foot of a hill, presented such a well-integrated structure of local cults that I could not confine myself to the gods and was *compelled* to include the goddesses—Māriyamman at the center, Kālī at the boundary—in a study of the ensemble that they constituted together with Subrahmaṇya and Śiva. Because of the theme considered here, I will concentrate on the goddesses, reserving the possibility of returning later to the gods. But it is important to know that we have here, in fact, indissociable "wholes" that do not always appear so clearly elsewhere (even in Beck, op. cit., fig. 2, p. 98, and fig. 3, facing p. 98, where the function of Bhadrakālī beside Māriyamman is not clear, their two sanctuaries being equally oriented toward the north). The study was thus spatially much more restricted than foreseen because of the wealth of information. Two further visits were made in 1984 and 1986-87.

once again observe that the local variants are not the muffled echo of superior traditions whose reflected sound has been distorted, but rather that a "vertical" link must be assumed to have locally maintained—where, when, and how?—a formal and semantic rapport between the brahmanical ritual of Vedic origin and the so-called popular cults.

Although the area to be considered is on the whole quite circumscribed (the sanctuaries are found at intervals over a few dozen kilometers running almost straight from south to north), I will divide the presentation of the sites into two groups: first, those of Cennimalai (Periyar Dt., Perundurai Tk.) and Civanmalai (Periyar Dt., Dharapuram Tk.) with their double temples and the sanctuaries of neighboring goddesses; then, farther south, the goddess temples in Dhārāpuram (Periyar Dt., Dharapuram Tk.) and its surroundings. The northern group, even considered solely from the perspective of the goddesses, presents a very strong integration, no doubt due as much to the presence of an unusual mountain, a center of the world offered by nature, as to the small extent of the locality. No sacrificial post relating to buffalo sacrifice is to be seen there, but the jyotistambhas of the temples of male deities (above, p. 155 n. 82) ensure the presence of the recurring form and provide a valuable link between the higher cult, pure and codified, and that of the local goddesses, a link that is less evident farther to the south. On the other hand, only the sites around Dhārāpuram are connected with episodes from the MBh, while the countryside there is much flatter and a truly urban concentration has developed in Dhārāpuram itself. However, we shall see that there is no lack of similarities, at least in the ritual, and that we are indeed in a distinct socioreligious region where a particular caste of landowners makes its mark: the Kavuṇḍars, a local subsection of the Paḍaiyāṭcis who, farther east, are called Vaṉṉiyars, whose claims to a royal status have been noted. Here, however, the name Vaṉṉiyar is uncommon, perhaps even unknown, as is the reference to an eponymous ancestor Agni or Vaṉṉi. Dhārāpuram, for its part, lays historical claim to having been a capital, which could serve to explain its identification with Upaplavya in the *Virāṭaparvan*, capital of the Matsya kingdom where the Pāṇḍavas concealed themselves during their year of living incognito.[83] One of course knows nothing of the origin of this identification, which does not even have the plausibility of the reputedly "epic" sites around Delhi. This could be another form of the Kavuṇḍars' claims to royal status and kinship with the epic heroes.

a. Cennimalai and Civanmalai Temples and Festivals

The two sites of Cennimalai and Civaṉmalai also in their way constitute an ensemble. Not only do the two double temples at the top and bottom of the hill (plate 72) have their brahmotsavas within two days of the same date in the month of Tai, but the day of the chariot festival (*pausya-makaralagnam*) is the same; the procession in Cennimalai takes place in the morning, that in Civaṉmalai in the evening, in such a way that those attending are able to participate in both. In fact, pilgrims who come from throughout the region (roughly within a radius of three hundred kilometers), or from farther away (Mumbai, for example) should they originally come from one of these villages,[84] are

[83]Baliga 1966, 588.

[84]It is not certain whether the inhabitants of the respective villages had, for their part, to abide by this obligation.

obliged to follow both tēr processions. One cannot, therefore, be too attentive to the dates according to which the festivals of the goddesses are distributed in the two localities, and one must accord to each its place in the description. The variations in the ritual, incidentally, are of such magnitude that we cannot be sparing of either one. At the same time, this fact sets the limits of the inquiry and of the validity of its conclusions, since we were unable to find time to study other comparable ensembles.[85]

At Cennimalai, the annual brahmotsava of the Subrahmaṇya and Kailāsanātha temples immediately refers to the festival of Pirāttiyamman, a goddess situated on the settlement's northern border. The goddess's tēr procession takes place the day before the *grāmaśānti* of the double temple that marks the beginning of the brahmotsava. This is, moreover, not an isolated case in which a specifically local ritual is intended to ensure that the village is guarded while the festival is held. The symbols implemented are not, however, meaningless. Most of the grāmaśānti occurs near the *śūlakkal* (the stone at the śūla), which is placed at the base of the jyotistambha on its eastern side. This stone (here aniconic, but at Civanmalai a stele engraved with a beautiful triśūla; plate 73) represents Subrahmaṇya's *astra* or "weapon," which replaces him in purificatory functions, that is, in the fight against malevolent influences. It is certainly not a matter of chance that in both Cennimalai and Civanmalai, the śūlakkal is found leaning back against the jyotistambha. Let us bear in mind that this post with a square base and decorated with reliefs culminates in iron rings that must support a fire-containing pot on the day of Kṛttikā in Kārttikai (December). We now discover fire associated with a new form of post, but one that remarkably reproduces the recurrent silhouette of a Pōtu Rāju.[86]

i. Cennimalai

• *The Pirāttiyamman Temple and Its Festival*

The Pirāttiyamman temple is a local one of the Kavuṇḍar caste, but its location makes it a guardian of Cennimalai's northern boundary. The temple has been recently renovated—a sign of wealth—and the sanctuary has been given two enormous munis who stand guard on either side of the maṇḍapa, facing north like the goddess. In front of the sanctuary and on its axis is a lion, vehicle of the virgin goddess. Her name Pirāttiyamman is unusual. Perhaps one may see it as a local deformation of Parā Śakti, the supreme śakti. Although most boundary goddesses in this region are one or another form of Kālī, Pirātti, as befitting the goddess of a dominant caste, would represent a form superior to them, yet still warlike: in her sanctuary she stands upright and her four arms bear the customary weapons (identical to those of the Māriyammans in Tanjavur, with their variants). The structure is surrounded by an enclosure wall within which, in the southeast corner, the Saptamātṛkās appear with Gaṇeśa and Vīrabhadra, while in the

[85]It seems, however, that Gangayam and its environs mark the northern boundary. No further reference to the MBh is found there, and the Veḷḷāla Kavuṇḍars are more numerous there than the Paḍaiyāṭcis.

[86]At the same time this form refers to the festival in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai on the same date, where a large fire is lit on the hilltop in commemoration of the manifestations of Siva's liṅga of fire (*liṅgodbhava*), while another is lit at the bottom of the hill on a post placed in front of the dhvajastambha.

opposite northwest corner a raised platform bears a tree with milky sap—named locally *iccimaram* (probably *Ficus tsiela* [Roxb.])—under which is sheltered a small Kaṟuppu shrine that consists of two aniconic stones covered by a permanent canopy and, to the side, this well-known Vīraṉ himself (plate 80).[87] Finally, to the left of the entrance inside the northern enclosure wall and facing south, a classical Bhairava introduces an "āgamic" note into the goddess's environment: he is without any doubt a kṣetrapāla, but who then is Kaṟuppu?[88]

The annual festival lasts one day (excluding the erection of the dhvajastambha on the evening of the preceding day) and is centered entirely around the tēr procession. In the morning, the mūlavar receives an abhiṣeka. That evening, the paṇḍāram and the crowd (local but not exclusively Kavuṇḍar) go to the Kailāsanātha temple where Pirātti's utsavamūrti is permanently kept. This is not, as is sometimes the case, just a security measure. The paṇḍāram does not enter the temple, but Śiva's gurukkaḷ has four persons to carry the processional statue of Pirātti, which is placed in the smallest of the two tērs owned by the village. Beforehand, the gurukkaḷ (and not the paṇḍāram) has offered her pūjā and broken open a coconut. The chariot then covers part of the rathavīthi, which is also the route followed by the procession of Subrahmaṇya and Kailāsanātha a few days later, and stops to make a halt at the Pirātti temple. The latter in effect is close to the route of the rathavīthi, and a detour is made to take the tēr there. The utsavamūrti is deposited in the maṇḍapa of the goddess's temple and it is again the gurukkaḷ who offers pūjā to her, while the public files past offering coconuts, bananas, etc. There is no question of animal victims.[89] The mūrti, placed again on the tēr, then completes the circuit of the rathavīthi and returns to the Kailāsanātha temple on the same evening. The entire route is covered in three or four hours.

The Pirāttiyammaṉ temple is obviously much influenced by āgamic ritual: for instance, no place is made for Kaṟuppu during the festival, although his small sanctuary is clearly the object of a very active private cult. The temple, on the other hand, is connected with the celebration of Vijayādaśamī, to which the small square maṇḍapa to the right of the entrance and outside the enclosure bears witness.[90] It is rather as if, profiting from its location on the northern boundary—more prestigious than the opposite direction—the Kavuṇḍars had imposed their goddess as the village deity.

- *Ellaimākāḷiyammaṉ*

It is quite another matter when it comes to Ellaimākāḷiyammaṉ ("Mahākālī of the boundary") whose sanctuary on Cennimalai's southern boundary is with good reason a village temple (fig. 4). More precisely—in a situation that corresponds to the administrative divisions of Kongunad,[91] where what we would term a "village," an *ūr*

[87]We shall return to Kaṟuppu's iconography.

[88]It will be remembered that in Āndhra, Pōtu Rāju at times assumes the features of Bhairava. Cf. above, p. 7 and plate 5.

[89]Notwithstanding this participation of a gurukkal priest in the festival and this festival's articulation with the grāmaśānti of the god's temple, the gurukkal informant admits no connection between the two festivals.

[90]Below, pp. 271-72.

[91]Cf. Beck 1972, 110.

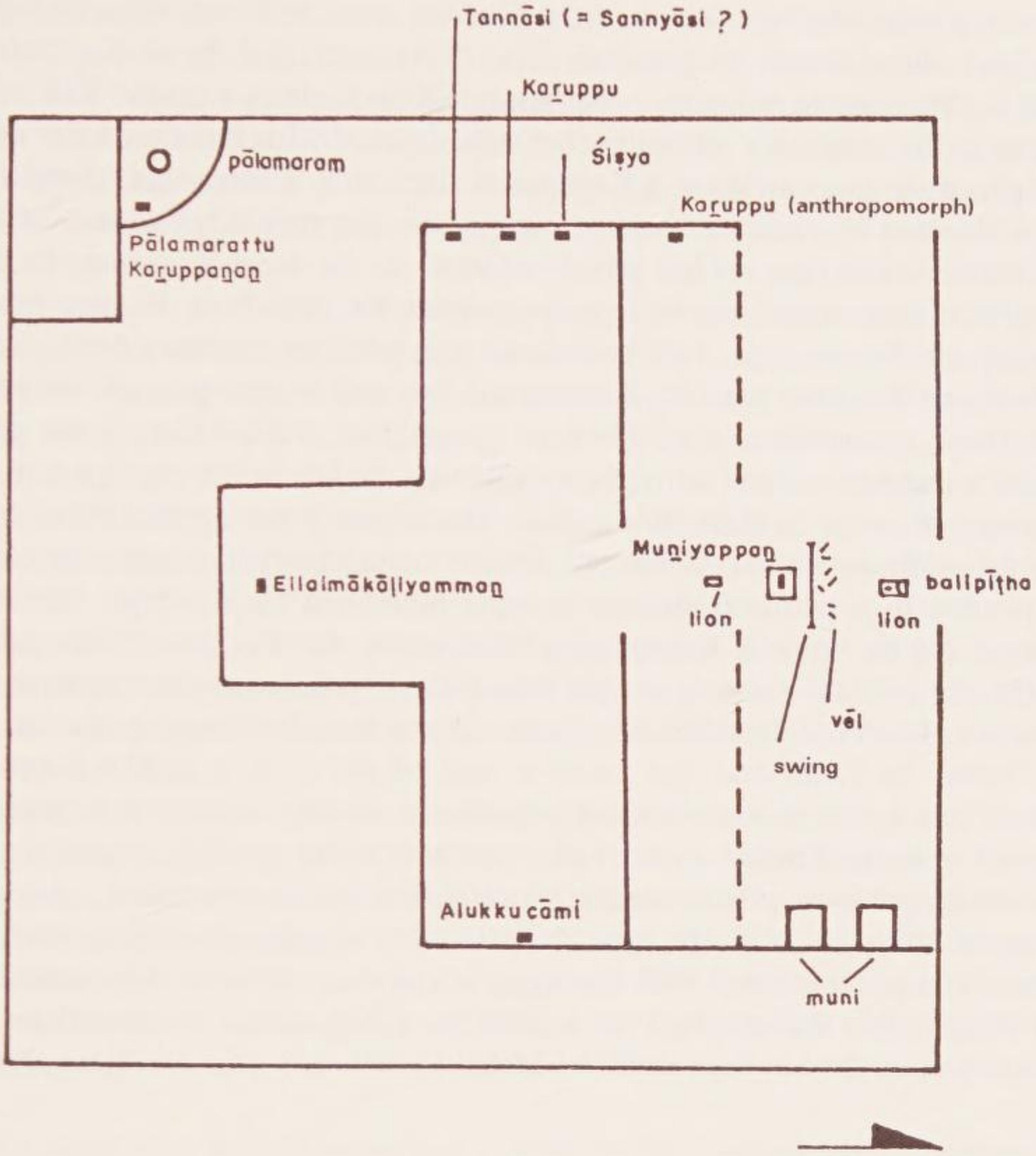

Fig. 4. Cennimalai, Ellaimākāḷiyamman temple

in local usage, joins with several others to form one grāma—four ūrs are here combined for the *tiruvilā,* the large annual festival of Kālī on Cennimalai's southern boundary. Viṭṭakkāḍu, Kāttūr, and Ammāpāḷaiyam villages thus join together with Cennimalai. Whereas at the Pirātti temple a Kavuṇḍar claimed to be the sanctuary's "owner," but only provisionally represented the dharmakartā, whom the divided community was unable to elect,[92] worship at the Mahākālī temple is regularly organized by a committee of Kavuṇḍar "trustees" under the presidency of a *muppattukkārar*. The latter is the local name of the dharmakartā, employed as a technical term whose precise meaning no one knew: could it mean "in the service of the Thirty (*muppattu*)," that is, the gods of Indra's heaven, for whom the goddess herself is a guardian?[93] He is chosen for a

[92]In fact, the government had taken control of the administration of the temple for two years, provoking some distress among the people.

[93]For a different orthography, and thus a different interpretation of the term, cf. Beck 1981, 90.

period of ten years by the villagers of the four ūrs to preside over the worship of this temple, and the function is presently (in 1981) exercised by a Kavuṇḍar from Viṭṭakkāḍu. The sanctuary, open to the north, accommodates a seated Kālī with four arms bearing the customary attributes, her head arrayed with flames. In the maṇḍapa, to the right of the sanctum door, a Kaṟuppu is flanked by a sannyāsin (*tannāsi*) seated on a tiger skin and his disciple. Facing the sannyāsin, a certain Aḷakkucāmi "who never bathes" mysteriously opposes his grime—*aḷakku*—to the ascetics' purity. In the open gallery preceding the maṇḍapa, an anthropomorphic Kaṟuppu is in the same position as the Kaṟuppu in the maṇḍapa. Two lions stand watch before sanctuary door, one within the gallery and the other outside. Between the two and in the open air, an altogether rākṣasic Muṉiyappaṉ statue (plate 74) faces the goddess. Behind him are the goddess's swing and a number of śūlas set in the ground. To the left in the courtyard, two large munis attract attention by their vivid colors. The edifice is surrounded by an enclosure wall. In the southwest corner of this wall, behind the sanctuary but within the courtyard, a tree planted in a platform shelters a stone blackened by worship. The tree is a *pālamaram* and the stone is Kaṟuppaṉaṉ-Pālamarattu, the Kaṟuppu of the pālamaram (plate 75). At the Māriyammaṉ temple (see below), *pālamaram* is synonymous with *pāccamaram*. I was unable to identify the tree in question, but keeping in mind that *pāl* means "milk" in Tamil and that *pācci* is one of the word's spoken forms (*Tamil Lexicon*, s.v.), it can be assumed that *pālamaram* or *pāccamaram* is a generic term corresponding to the Sanskrit *kṣīravṛkṣa*, "tree with milky sap." It is possible that the term would have a more precise meaning locally, but the tree is certainly characterized by its sap of milky color. In the case of Pirātti, it is a matter of a *Ficus tsiela*. These two *kṣīravṛkṣas* are associated with Kaṟuppu, whom they shelter in their shade, like the pipal in Andhra that shelters the Pōtu Rāju at the village center of the village. Twelve paṇḍārams are attached to the service of Mahākālī and each year one takes this role in turn.

●● *Description of the Festival*

The annual festival—the tiruviḷā—takes place in Mārkaḻi (December-January) and lasts ten days. This is, significantly, in the same period of the year as the brahmotsava of the hilltop temple and of Pirātti (January-February). Probably these festivals are connected with the winter solstice, which occurs at the beginning of the sun's ascendant course—the *uttarāyaṇa*—during the cool season. Expenses for the festival are collected from the inhabitants of the four ūrs.

The first day must be a Wednesday. After having made offerings to the goddess, a solemn abhiṣeka and a pūjā, the villagers—in her presence—fix the day of her "marriage"—*tirukalyāṇam*—which must take place on the ninth day, that is, the Thursday of the following week. From the second to, and including, the sixth day, Kālī receives only her ordinary daily worship. But from the first day on, each evening Mādāris (leather workers better known as Cakkilis), who come mainly from Ammāpāḷaiyam, play drums in the temple courtyard and men come to dance. On the seventh day, a Tuesday, a gurukkaḷ from the Kailāsanātha temple must install in the maṇḍapa a pot filled with water and closed with a coconut and mango leaves. He shapes a Gaṇeśa out of dough and turmeric and makes a pūja to it; then he sprinkles the temple

with water from the pot. This is the *puṇyavācana,* as if the festival had only just begun. In the evening, between eight and nine o'clock, the paṇḍāram, gurukkaḷ, Kavuṇḍar trustees, and a few villagers proceed to the *teppakkuḷam* (the tank of the Śiva temple) with a clay pot purchased by the Kālī temple. The pūcāri bathes, fills the pot with water, and places it on the steps of the tank. It is then decorated with neem leaves and coconut palms. The gurukkaḷ performs pūjā to the pot and ties a kaṅkaṇa on it and on the pūcāri. The latter enters into trance—he is both the priest and the goddess's cāmiyāḍi—and places the pot on his head, therewith opening the procession that will lead the muppattukkārar, trustees, and villagers with the musicians and their Dhobi (launderer), who carries a torch fashioned of very tightly twisted cotton, to the Mahākālī temple, traversing the northern and eastern streets of the rathavīthi. Generally, several of the participants also enter into trance. Having arrived at the temple, the pūcāri places the pot to the left of the goddess, ties a kaṅkaṇa to the latter, then to the Kaṟuppu of the maṇḍapa, to the lions, and to Muṉiyappaṉ (more precisely, to the small stone placed in front of him, which is the "true" Muṉiyappaṉ, the sacrificial stone). He then offers a large pūjā to the goddess in the presence of the gurukkaḷ. Cooked rice is presented to the other deities of the sanctuary by the paṇḍāram's assistant, and *vibhūti* is distributed as prasāda. Whereupon festivities resume; starting at midnight are dances to the sound of the Mādāris' drums.

The eighth day is reserved for vegetarian castes: Brahmans and Ceṭṭiyārs file into the temple carrying *māviḷakkus*, fresh coconuts, and oil; the priest must perform an abhiṣeka of the goddess with the items brought by each devotee. That evening there is again dancing to the rhythm of drums (when the Brahmans and Ceṭṭiyārs are no longer to be seen). At midnight, the pūcāri cleans the sanctuary with turmeric and places vermilion poṭṭus on all the deities. This is the night from the eighth to the ninth day, the Great Night, which elsewhere is that of the buffalo sacrifice; but here it is a marriage that is announced.

On the ninth day, beginning at five o'clock in the morning and subsequent to an abhiṣeka of the goddess, the paṇḍāram decorates the goddess and she is perfumed with musk and coated with turmeric. A meal of sweet rice—*cakkara-poṅgal*—is given to her and she is offered pūjā. The prasāda is then distributed, beginning with the muppattukkārar. The women of the latter's family come to prepare poṅgal in the eastern part of the sanctuary, while the muppattukkārar brings a goat. The Nāḍar executioner sacrifices the animal at the stone of Muṉiyappaṉ and pours its blood over the anthropomorphic Muṉiyappaṉ. The muppattukkārar's family takes the goat to their house, and the poṅgal they have prepared is offered to the goddess. After this, all those who voluntarily made poṅgal offer theirs. From each of them the pūcāri takes a small quantity of rice and puts it aside for the evening. For his part, until evening the Nāḍar sacrifices goats and cocks to Muṉiyappaṉ for all who appear with offerings. There can be as many as one hundred goats and one thousand cocks each year. Toward half past seven, the muppattukkārar, trustees, and villagers return to the temple. At the former's command, the pūcāri performs his ablutions, places a garland of the goddess around his neck, and again puts the pot on his head to take it once more in procession to the same tank with the same participants as had previously accompanied him. He is again in trance and dances all along the route, which follows the western street of the rathavīthi. When he leaves the

temple, the Nāḍar sacrifices a goat (purchased by the village) and applies a poṭṭu of blood on both the pot and the pūcāri. The whole of this day's ritual is called *tiru-kalyāṇam,* although there has been no marriage. Incidentally, Mahākālī permanently wears the poṭṭu and the tāli of a married woman, notwithstanding her lion. The pūcāri disposes of the pot and his own kaṅkaṇa in the tank. At the same time, his assistant, who has remained at the temple, removes all the kaṅkaṇas and throws them into the neighboring well. After having returned to the temple, the worship of the goddess consists notably in the offering of the cooked rice that the priest had put aside that morning. He then gives some to the Mādāris (drummers), the potter who made the pot, the Nāḍar executioner, and the Dhobi who had illuminated the two processions with his torch.

On Friday, the muppattukkārar and the trustees come to the temple to examine the accounts and, after a pūjā to Kālī, leave. That night the pūcāri performs another pūjā to the goddess, then closes the door of the sanctum. He sacrifices a cock to Kaṟuppu and makes him an offering of *kaḷḷu* (toddy) and arrack. He cooks the cock and eats it there.

●● *Analysis: Tirukalyāṇam, or Scenes from a Marriage*

In its very simplified form (compared with those we shall study in the same micro-region), this Kālī festival consists of a number of remarkable features. To begin with, there is its date: this festival precedes that of Pirātti, which is linked with the brahmotsava of the gods of the hill. In a certain manner, this is to say that it also combines the celebration of the goddess with that of the gods. There are even fewer reasons to separate them, since Kālī needs the services of a gurukkaḷ, and because one day of her festival, the eighth, is reserved for the worship offered by upper-caste devotees. Her tiruviḻā thus represents the initial preparation of the settlement's boundaries against outside attacks, and the nighttime procession of the pot (a form of the goddess) from the seventh to the eighth days follows the same rathavīthi as Pirātti's tēr. Here, however, there is no tēr and the procession is not of the same nature. The pot becomes a goddess on the bank of the teppakkuḷam, and her conveyance to the temple on the head of the possessed priest constitutes the first half of the procession. The second will take place on the night of the ninth day to return her to the tank by the same procedure. It is, therefore, not a question of visiting the locality, but of the course that is followed between the point of emergence and the point of final reabsorption (the teppakkuḷam), with a halt at the temple on the southern boundary.

However, it is obviously the tirukalyāṇam that draws our attention. The remarks we cited about this marriage that is not a marriage, involving a goddess who is in any case married, were those of the paṇḍāram, who also expressed his embarrassment. A "true" marriage would involve the presence of a gurukkaḷ, an oblation fire, in short, the customary apparatus of a marriage of the brahmanical type. Otherwise, the fact that the goddess would already be married does not prevent the annual renewal of her marriage, as for example in the large Śiva temples. Nothing of the like here, however. As the question will recur in one form or another about other temples, it is better to examine the ritual facts somewhat more closely. First of all, since the goddess bears the poṭṭu and the tāli, what does the lion signify that appears as her vehicle before her door? The

initial response, entirely negative, is that her husband cannot be Śiva, for if he were, she would be preceded by the bull Nandin and not by the lion.

It is perhaps the structure of the animal sacrifices that allows us to advance a bit further. Before this consideration, let us note again, among the offerings brought by the upper castes on the eighth day, the flour lamps—*māviḷakkus*—that could be the sole vestige remaining from the properly sacrificial model in the upper-caste cult.[94] On the ninth day, the goddess essentially eats rice: a sweet poṅgal in the morning, another poṅgal around midday, and the remainder of that meal in the evening after the immersion of her pot in the tank. In parallel, it is her guardian Muṉiyappaṉ who, facing her sanctuary, that is, practically before her very eyes,[95] receives first a goat offered by the liturgical head of the local collectivity, and then all the victims that have been brought by nonvegetarian devotees before they return to their houses to partake of the offerings. These votive sacrifices have no collective significance after that of the muppattukkārar. But in the evening, it is different for the goat sacrifice at the moment when the possessed priest, whose garland identifies him with the goddess, again places the pot on his head to convey it to the tank. The goat has in this instance been purchased with money collected for the festival and is thus a victim offered by the grāma; its blood is used to mark the goddess's pot and the man possessed by the goddess with a poṭṭu, reproducing the vermilion poṭṭu placed the previous night on the brows of all the deities. This time it is indeed a marriage poṭṭu, but a marriage consummated in the sacrifice of the animal-spouse. It is the only goat that can be said to be offered to the goddess, even though she occupies only a temporary form and will soon disappear in the water of the teppakkuḷam. The cock sacrificed on the last day is, on the contrary, clearly intended for Kaṟuppu, since the door of the goddess's sanctum is closed so that she can remain unaware of it. Again, we find here something of the ritual configuration of the buffalo sacrifice in Āndhra: the first goat is intended for Muṉiyappaṉ, as it can be in the case of Pōtu Rāju. The second—which corresponds to the buffalo in Āndhra sacrificed in front of the goddess's temporary effigy—also apparently immolated in front of Muṉiyappaṉ, has a particular link to Kālī that exceeds its strictly sacrificial context so as to concur with that of a marriage. At this point, matters can become irrevocably obscure: is the cāmiyāḍi only the goddess, or at the same time her husband? Does he receive the poṭṭu as husband or as an incarnation of the goddess? It will be recalled that the Pot-rāj of the Mahār quarter of Ṣoḷāpur has already presented a problem of this type; he was at once the goddess and the Buffalo, and one was near Karṇāṭaka where the Buffalo is the goddess's low-caste husband.[96] Kongunad is also near. Moreover, who is this husband? Muṉiyappaṉ? But who is this Muṉiyappaṉ who was already found in Ramnad preceded by a post with an impalement stake?[97] We compared him then with the munis of Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ, who are vegetarian. What is to be thought of this

[94]Cf. above, pp. 89, 134-35, and 141, n. 63, where the symbolism appears to be constant.

[95]At no time during the day was the closing of the door to the sanctum mentioned, but there could be a curtain there, as useful for the strictly private consumption of the meal of rice as for the separation from the blood sacrifice. But the rite of the procession of the pot in the evening renders this supposition quite idle.

[96]Above, p. 28.

[97]Above, p. 154.

bloodthirsty muni, and should we see in him the goddess's husband? So many questions that must for the moment remain unanswered, but which must be asked.

As to the nocturnal dances to the sound of the Mādāris' drums, although one should not hasten to interpret them as more than a festive element quite naturally integrated in the jubilant atmosphere, men dancing in the darkness by way of prelude to the also nocturnal blood marriage of the goddess probably has a "terrible" connotation, redolent of the total war of world destruction. This raises another question that cannot yet be satisfactorily answered. There is also nothing further to be said for now about the Karuppu in the maṇḍapa who plays a secondary role: we do not know how the sannyāsin and his disciple flanking Karuppu would react to the cock offered to him at the conclusion of the festival, nor is it known what Alakkucāmi signifies, whom we shall not see again. As for the Pālamarattu-Karuppaṇaṉ behind the sanctuary, he is perhaps beneath his tree in the position of a kṣetrapāla, as he could be with Pirāttiyammaṉ. Here, however, he probably represents above all an object of private devotion. But we have not yet finished speaking of Karuppu.

• *Māriyammaṉ Temple*

The Māriyammaṉ temple in Cennimalai offers us the first occasion to return to him. At the center of the agglomeration, facing east, the goddess's sanctuary is surrounded by an enclosure wall that accommodates in the northeast corner a very "classical" Gaṇeśa shrine with its sanctum and a small maṇḍapa (fig. 5). Exactly in front of Māriyammaṉ and behind a lion that, once again, serves as her vehicle, a small stone blackened by worship stands in the courtyard. It bears the name Kambattu-Karuppucāmi, "Karuppu of the post" (plates 76, 77).[98] Here, Karuppu is not beneath a tree and relegated to a corner but is associated with a post that will assume an important place in the cult. We can already note that the post is constituted by a *pālamaram* or *pāccamaram* branch: there is thus at least this feature that is constant in Karuppu's relation to a tree with milky sap. The goddess's priest is of higher status than Ellaimākkāḷiyammaṉ's, for he is a Cōḷi Veḷḷāḷa.[99] The temple itself is located in a Ceṅkunta Mudaliyār quarter, whose weavers represent the most immediately visible economic element in Cennimalai.

•• *Description of the Festival*

The goddess's festival takes place from the fifth to the twentieth of Aippaci (October-November), whereas the Skandaṣaṣṭhi of the Subrahmaṇya temple begins on the day of the new moon in Aippaci, that is, a few days earlier. This date does not correspond to the autumnal Durgāpūjā; it is somewhat later, but it is probably no less related to the

[98]Cf. Beck 1981, fig. 1, facing p. 84, where the plan of the Māriyammaṉ temple in Kaṉṉapuram presents the same schema, announcing an analogous, but not identical, ritual, as will be seen. It will here play the role of an additional variant. Moreover, in Cennimalai, as in Civaṉmalai, there is no memory of a buffalo sacrifice to Māriyammaṉ. However, popular memory is known to be short, doubtlessly aided in this by today's gurukkals.

[99]Veḷḷālas (a caste of landowners) from the Cōḷa country come broadly speaking from the lower Kāverī basin, beginning at Tirucirapalli. Cf. Thurston 1909, vol. 7, p. 373, s.v. Vellāla.

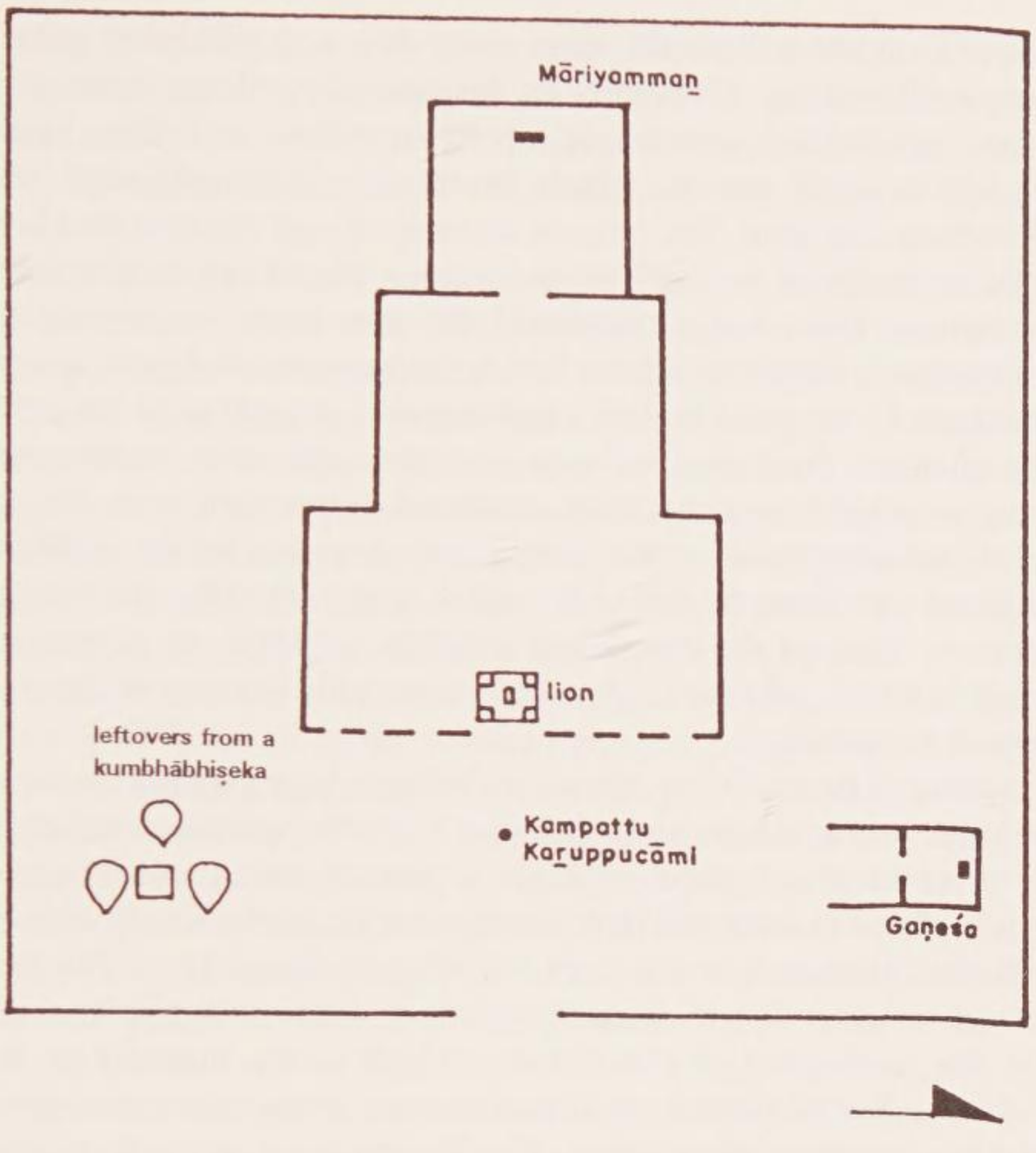

Fig. 5. Cennimalai, Māriyamman temple

autumn equinox. Otherwise, nothing in our survey would make it possible to discern a direct link with the Skandaṣaṣṭhi. If reference to the opening and concluding dates is considered, the festival follows a model of sixteen days, even though informants mention only fifteen. As with nearly everywhere that the long model of the festival prevails, the first day is followed by an empty period. On the first, the priest inaugurates the festival by going to inform the entire village that it is beginning.[100] In addition, he prepares four packets of navadhānya (theoretically, nine varieties of grain) tied in pieces of cloth that have been dyed yellow, and then proceeds to attach them to trees in the four directions at the boundaries of the ūr: mango and tamarind trees. This is obviously the form that surveillance of the boundaries takes here as a necessary measure for an auspicious development of the ritual within the ūr.

The goddess's festival proper begins on the seventh day, on which a gurukkaḷ from the Kailāsanātha temple accompanies Māriyammaṉ's utsavamūrti to her temple to offer

[100]For the Māriyammaṉ festival, no allusion was made to a grouping of several ūrs in a grāma, or to the presiding function of the muppattukkārar. Informants, including the Veḷḷāḷa priest, spoke in turn during the investigation without bringing out the oppositions and hierarchies that are usually apparent. I do not know who presides over the festival.

her pūjā (henceforth, he will do the same every day, and will bring naivedya for the goddess from Kailāsanātha). Conjointly on the same day, villagers go out in search of a pāccamaram (pālamaram) post whose top forms a fork with three branches. They deposit this post in a well near the temple for the day. That night, they retrieve it and take it to Kambattu-Karuppu. The latter is taken down and the new post is raised in its place; a goat is sacrificed to it at the same time. The victim is given whole to the Paṟaiyar drummers (who had accompanied the post from the well to the temple). Kambattu-Karuppu is simply laid down beside the newly erected post, and now that the latter stands in place, the gurukkaḷ ties a kaṅkaṇa to it, as well as to the goddess and the pūcāri. The goddess then receives a poṭṭu and a tāli, and at this very moment Māriyammaṉ, who had been considered unmarried, marries the post. When the post is later removed and submerged in "the Ganges" (as described by the Veḷḷāḷa priest; it is in fact a different well from the first), she will be widowed. After this initial disruption of the customary order of the temple and this first sacrifice, the eighth day is like a latency period in which only Śiva's gurukkaḷ pursues his worship of the utsavamūrti in the maṇḍapa of the temple.

On the evening of the ninth day, the potter brings a large clay pot that he cuts in two, placing the lower part upside down in the upper half, the opening of which becomes the base of the receptacle thus formed (no doubt to provide some thermal insulation) (plate 76). The pot is placed in front of Māriyammaṉ, and the pūcāri fills it with wood that he kindles with the camphor from the ārati he offers to the goddess. He then takes the flaming pot and carries it directly from the sanctuary to the post, placing it in the latter's forked top; this takes place at about three o'clock in the morning to the sound of Paṟaiyars' drums. For this initial transfer of the pot, women have brought flour lamps that they arrange in front of the goddess. The firepot, called *pū-caṭṭi, pū-oṭu,* or *akkiṉi-caṭṭi,* remains in place until six in the morning. This is the tenth day of the festival, a Saturday.[101] The pūcāri bathes, offers pūjā to Māriyammaṉ, and puts a garland from the goddess around his neck. Then he also does pūjā to the *kambam* (<Skt. *skambha*, "post") and a karpurārati to the drums, and returns to the sanctuary to deposit the implements of worship there. Back at the post, he then takes the pūcaṭṭi in his arms and circles the post thrice and the temple once, dancing in a state of trance to the sound of the Paṟaiyars' drums. Sometimes tiring, he stops and sits down, and those who gather around him sing of the goddess, invigorating him so that he rises and continues, until finally he places the pot before the goddess. Now he sets a pot (*kumbam* <Skt. *kumbha,* "pot") filled with water and decorated with margosa leaves[102] in the forked top of the kambam where the pūcaṭṭi had been, replacing the latter. During the entire time of his

[101]There is an inaccuracy here, indeed a contradiction, in the information. If the date of the month is fixed, it is impossible that the tenth day would always be a Saturday. For Ellaimākāliyammaṉ, the days of the week are determined. It is possible that the informants gave as dates for the beginning and end of the festival those of the current year. Cf. below. The dates of the goddess festivals in the region are always related to the days of the week.

[102]When is this kumbha brought? This was not specified, but it is certain that it is not the kumbha that "marries" the post, but directly Māriyammaṉ who receives pottu and tāli. For another variant, cf. Beck 1981, 88.

ecstatic dancing, women continually carry water from the well that they pour over his feet and body, as also over the forked post. For some five days (or perhaps six, if there are really sixteen days to the festival?), the same alternation of the pūcaṭṭi and the pot with water and margosa is repeated, transforming the surroundings of the temple and post into a virtual marsh.

During the festival's last three days, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth, while rites in the temple continue their course, Māriyamman̲'s utsavamūrti is taken out, accompanied by the gurukkaḷ, in procession into the village where the procession follows the rathavīthi. On the fourteenth day, which must be a Wednesday,[103] women also escort the processional statue with lit māviḷakkus on their copper trays; this is the only time my informants mentioned the participation of women from neighboring localities. From four to five hundred lamps illuminate the procession, which also includes an entire orchestra of musicians. Only men from the Kavuṇḍar caste[104] take part in the procession, while women of all castes are admitted, with the exclusion of Pa̲ṟaiyars.

On the fifteenth and last day, after the habitual exchange of the pūcaṭṭi and the kumbha on the post in the morning, women prepare a poṅgal in the temple courtyard. At nightfall, the priest once again, for the second time, sets the pot with fire on its three-pronged support. He pours water over it to extinguish it before lifting it, and then takes it away to set it, now thoroughly extinguished, near the mūlavar. In a trance, he proceeds to take down the forked post and carry it to another well—"the Gaṅgā"—where it will be left forever (no doubt along with the kumbha and its neem leaves). It is at this moment that the poṅgal is offered to the goddess.[105] The women then receive the offered rice, which they take to their homes where a cock or a goat will be sacrificed to complete the meal. The gurukkaḷ, who was able to attend the whole ceremony in the absence of blood sacrifice, then bears the utsavamūrti on its platform to the Śiva temple. Māriyamman̲ loses the insignia of a wife and becomes a widow. All the kaṅkaṇas are then removed.

●● *Analysis: Kambam, Kumbha, Pūcaṭṭi, Māviḷakku*

A single blood sacrifice punctuates this festival within the limits of the temple. It is offered not to the post that had been erected, but to Kambattu-Ka̲ṟuppu, earlier dug up from the earth to be replaced by the post. The cocks and goats sacrificed at home indicate not only the votive character of their immolation, but also the goddess's repugnance toward blood. Here, as in the ritual observed by Beck (1981), there can be no doubt regarding the "marriage" celebrated between the goddess and the post. The low status of the latter is above all shown by the Pa̲ṟaiyar drummers who accompany the

[103]If the tenth day, a Saturday, is taken as a point of reference, this would mean that the end of the festival is the following Thursday. This accords with Beck 1981, 91. The goddess must regain her normal state (as must Ka̲ṟuppu) on Friday. But it is not likely that the festival begins on a Thursday (hypothesis of a fifteen-day duration), and a Wednesday would better agree with other information (below), as well as with the sixteen-day model.

[104]Apparently always the Padaiyāṭcis in this region. In the zone studied by B. Beck, the title Kavuṇḍar, it seems, is applied to the Veḷḷāḷars.

[105]It is likely that the mūlavar fasted during the festival, and that this poṅgal is her first meal. During this entire period, only the utsavamūrti received the gurukkaḷ's worship and offerings of naivedya.

goddess's arrival at and departure from the temple, in contrast to the orchestra in the goddess's procession over the rathavīthi. These are the same drums that are associated with all the ritual that takes place around the post and the temple, as well as with the trance of the priest. The latter performs an ārati to them after the pūjā to the post and before the circumambulation of the pūcaṭṭi. The pradakṣiṇā itself is accompanied by the same drums, which poses a few problems in terms of interpretation. Kaṟuppu belongs to the "low caste" group, since he is offered the only goat during the entire festival—a goat given to the Paṟaiyars, while the castes present are also meat eaters—and since he is linked to the post by its location: exactly facing the goddess on the axis of the sanctuary, that is, in the position of guardian-devotee, as is the case with Pōtu Rāju. The latter, on the other hand, when he is alone at the center of an Āndhra village, is sheltered beneath a pipal or perhaps a neem-pipal couple of which the former has disappeared. The pipal, another *Ficus* with milky sap, can, as we have seen, be only a male symbol, as are the species utilized for the foundational post in Kāṇakoṇā, or the vertical pole of the ceḍil in Nāgapaṭṭiṉam. But Pōtu Rāju is also masculine, notwithstanding the material, śamī, of which he is fashioned, and the pipal is fundamental in his symbolism. Here it is Kaṟuppu who seems to be another form of post from a "milky-sapped" tree. A noteworthy fact, however, for whoever might come to Kongu-nad from Āndhra via Tanjavur, is the complete disappearance of Kāttavarāyaṉ and of his impalement stake and the substitution of Kaṟuppu and/or the post.[106] Furthermore, the pointed impalement stake (and pointed hooks) gives place to a three-pronged fork intended to serve as a support rather than an instrument of torture. In the hypothesis of a "marriage," the kumbha decorated with margosa leaves and placed on this comfortable seat quite fittingly evokes the *bhāryā,* the wife whose husband "must bear or support" her. It is therefore the identity of the post-husband that poses a problem. No local informant would venture to formulate an hypothesis on this matter. On this initial level of analysis, we shall keep the question in mind. The proximity of Karṇāṭaka, however, authorizes us to relate the post-Kaṟuppu to the young Brahman woman's low-caste husband whose punishment condemned him to be reborn as a sacrificial buffalo.[107] Here we must add what can be observed during a private votive offering to Kambattu-Kaṟuppu outside the festival period (plate 77). Whereas it does not include fire except in the form of a piece of camphor placed on the bare ground, it requires a large quantity of water to be poured *around* Kaṟuppu, from which the latter finally emerges as a small island, the camphor burning on the bank of the small pond. The water brought by women in large quantities during the festival and the transport of the pot of fire is, therefore, not solely intended to thwart its burning, even if it should also have that function.

This does not make the other problem posed by this ritual any clearer: the use of the pot of fire that for three hours every night replaces the kumbha of water on the top of

[106]The post of Māriyammaṉ is not always Kaṟuppu or the latter's temporary form. That probably does not change much in the underlying symbolism.

[107]The Māriyammaṉ temple in Kaṉṉapuram (open to the north) includes in the northwest corner of its enclosure a mysterious Pōtturājā who appears to have a soothing influence on the trance of the priest (Beck 1981, 89 n. 11).

the post, and that the priest must carry in trance each morning in his arms before placing it again in the sanctuary. Of course I do not broach this theme without a certain predisposition. On the one hand, there is the analysis undertaken by Beck (1981), who opposes the kumbha and the pūcaṭṭi as the calm, benevolent goddess and the same goddess raging in nocturnal fury; and, on the other hand, there are the further examples found along the way of a pot filled with fire or a firepot opposed to a kumbha decorated with neem leaves, whose interpretation was not obvious and could vary.[108] Nevertheless, we are at least forewarned against any hasty interpretation, since polysemy remains possible and the context must assist in the clarification of the pertinent significance in each specific instance. Concerning this Māriyamman in Kongunad, four descriptions (see below for the two others) are found of a homogeneous ritual complex that would have to guide the search for the pūcaṭṭi's identity. For the moment, we shall therefore confine ourselves to an initial level of analysis.

The alternation of the kumbha and the pūcaṭṭi gives high priority to the pot of water, since the pot of fire is only in place at the top of the post between three and six in the morning, that is, at the end of the night. But with the priest's trance and his lengthily danced and abundantly watered circumambulation, it is every now and then the pūcaṭṭi that occupies the foreground of the scene. On the possessed's identity, there is no possible doubt: he has only entered into trance after having a garland of the goddess passed over his neck. He thus incarnates her (and may elsewhere have at this moment an oracular function [Beck 1981, 89]). Accordingly, he finds himself identified with the kumbha and likewise "married" to the post. It is, however, his relation to the pūcaṭṭi that has the greater interest. The manner in which he carries it is already a problem: elsewhere, the fire-containing pot is carried on the head with a convenient insulation to prevent one's being burned. Here, the mode of conveyance does not correspond to anything known in profane practice. The pot, cut in two, has a diameter of roughly fifty centimeters; given these dimensions, it must be carried in the arms in such a way as to be pressed against the bearer's body. One is tempted to say that the priest embraces it, for a long time and probably not without a certain degree of suffering, since no system of insulation can prevent the release of heat in the open air. And the women pour water over the priest's feet rather than over the region of his body that is burned, or at least warmed to the limit of tolerance, by the pot. What matters at this time is less the relation of the post to the pūcaṭṭi than that of the possessed man to the pūcaṭṭi. The first relationship is subordinate to the second, and it is the interpretation of the latter that is important. It looks something like an embracing couple (let us note that the fire in the pot had been lit in front of the mūlavar with the flame from the ārati that the priest offered to the mūlavar before entering into trance), but embracing so as to be a kind of torture for the goddess-possessed man.

Let us also register a second feature: in this region, the ritual tortures of the Tanjavur area have disappeared. We find no firewalk, no cedil. Moreover, with its forked end the post no longer suggests the idea of torture, and despite the discreet character of the only

[108] Above, pp. 117, 136, and below, p. 275. We shall also observe below (p. 281) the use of a pot called *gaṅgaikaragam* in the sprinkling of the path of the firepot.

animal sacrifice that takes place near Kaṟuppu, the māviḷakkus carried by the women punctuate the ritual. They come to offer their flour lamps in the goddess's sanctuary from the beginning, and they carry them again around the utsavamūrti during its procession along the rathavīthi. This sacrificial symbol is certainly not gratuitous, and it is time to remark that, whereas one is accustomed to exclusively male victims, it is always women who bring māviḷakkus. Women, that is to say, who are as much domestic replicas of the goddess as wives (Paṟaiyar women are excluded), women who scale down the goddess by implicitly offering themselves as victims by the presentation of their māviḷakkus, and also by designating the goddess as such by the same means. Could we not then evoke the tortured Reṇukā who on the east coast is represented by her mūrti reduced to a head?[109] In other words, the possessed man who bears the pūcaṭṭi is the one who submits to the ritual torture (one recalls that elsewhere it is the priest who bears the goddess who always opens the firewalk). His weariness and pauses express this aspect of torture. For he is the goddess, and this is even clearer when, in this state of exhaustion, he must also function as an oracle and speak for her. It seems, moreover, that the entire ritual takes care to differentiate, by way of the treatment to which they are subjected, the goddess's two permanent representations, which are otherwise identical in plastic form and conform to the general model: the mūlavar and the utsavamūrti. The former appears to be condemned to fasting and receives no attention from the gurukkaḷ, while the latter is the object of regular worship on his part and is fed with naivedya from Kailāsanātha. When the utsavamūrti of the goddess is taken out in procession over the rathavīthi (by definition, the route of triumph), she is accompanied by the gurukkaḷ and women of good caste bearing māviḷakkus; she is then the exact replica of the goddess in Tanjavur going out in procession after the victory represented by her crossing of the fire. Here, the flour lamps recall the ordeal she has undergone, just as in Tanjavur the karagam of the firewalk is associated with the utsavamūrtis of the solemn procession that follows. Finally, when all has come to an end, the kumbha full of water is submerged (as it is everywhere), and so is the post, whereas the extinguished pūcaṭṭi remains within the sanctuary, unused.

Yet even if one rediscovers a familiar schema, two points remain obscure: the identity of the post and of that of the pūcaṭṭi. Of the latter, it is at no time said that it is in the position of husband in relation to the goddess. It is only the embrace during the dance of possession that would suggest this, at the same time as it more explicitly suggests a form of sacrifice in which the goddess would be the victim. We shall at this point discontinue the analysis to take it up again when we have enriched our information.

ii. Civaṉmalai

From Cen̲nimalai we proceed to Civaṉmalai, whose spatial organization is all the more ideal as it seems to be purely theoretical (unless it would betray the disappearance of a denser settlement). The double mountain temple (with the one at the bottom dedicated to Śiva under the name Nañjundeśvara) is oriented toward the east. The

[109]This form of the goddess will again be seen below. This is to say nothing further about the suffering of the woman symbolized by the mahā-vedi and the caṣāla of the Vedic post, which supplies a background.

Māriyamman̲ temple, located some fifty meters to Nañjundeśvara's left and north, also opens to the east and represents the ideal center of the settled area. Somewhat farther north and to the east, but facing north, stands the Vīrakāḷiyamman̲ temple, evidently the eastern boundary temple. Between these three places of worship is a large and nearly empty space with a few trees and two tērs sheltered beneath a thatch covering (fig. 6).

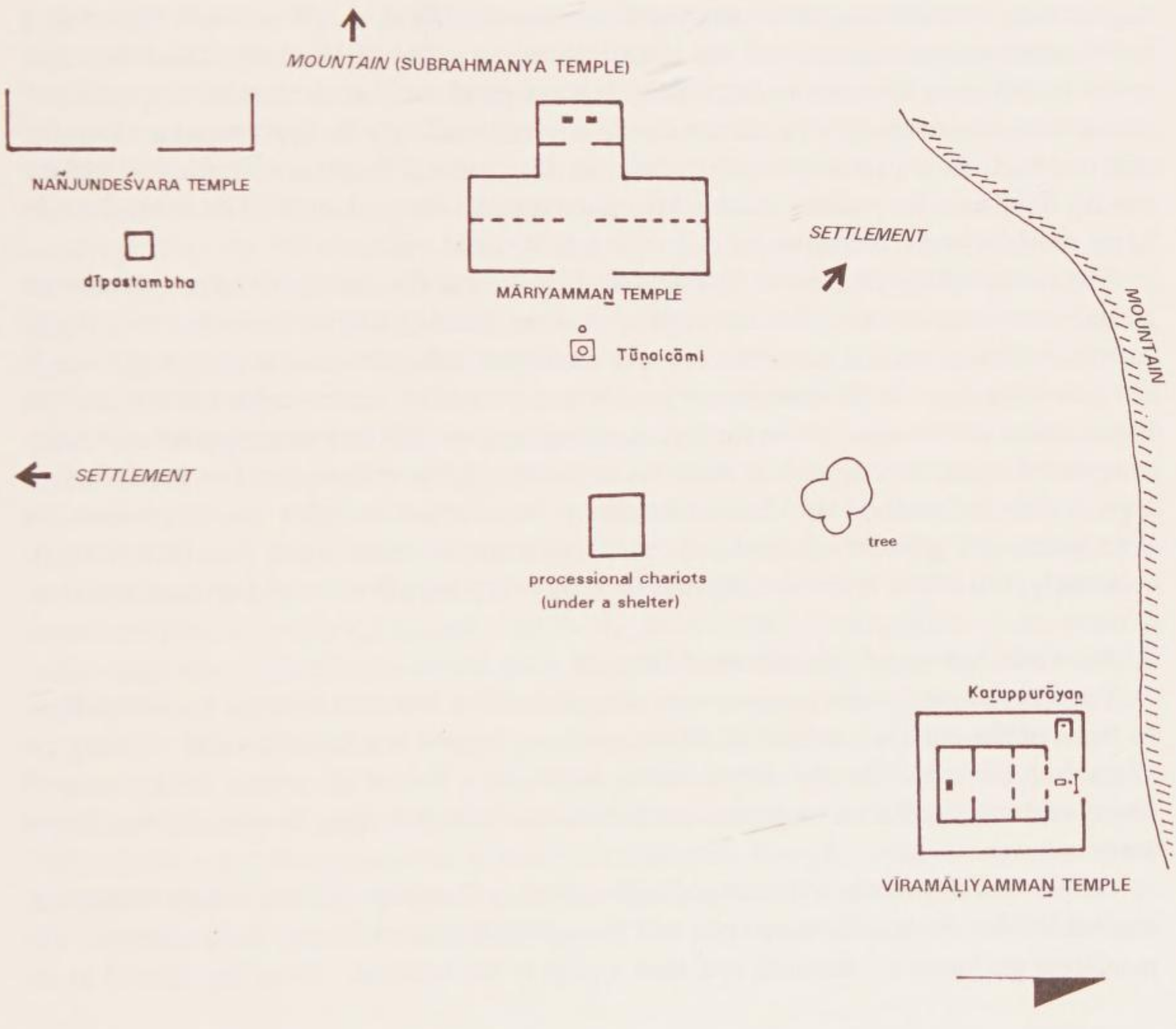

Fig. 6. The site at Civan̲malai

Because the theme we are considering always leads us to goddesses, we will not give much attention to the three-day festival at the Vīrakālī temple that is not this goddess's main festival. Suffice it to say that this three-day festival immediately precedes the festival in Tai (the same date as in Cennimalai) for the temples of Subrahmaṇya (on the hilltop) and Nañjundeśvara. Vīrakālī must fulfil the function of guardian of the boundaries by visiting the entire village (on the second day), then by traversing the rathavīthi on the smallest of the two tērs of the village on the third day. This is a sign of her triumph and of the security she provides to the village during the festival of the two great gods.

The main festival is the *poṅkalpaṇḍikai* (poṅgal festival), which lasts sixteen days in Paṅguṉi (March-April), beginning on the Tuesday following the new moon. This festival begins a day earlier than Māriyammaṉ's, whose tiruviḻā also lasts sixteen days and is held at the theoretical center of the village parallel to that of Vīrakālī. The officiating priest is the same for both temples (which are a good one hundred meters apart), and comes from one of the five paṇḍāram families in the locality who alternate in performing this function. Here, the one who functions as dharmakartā is called *kottukkārar* and the locally dominant Kavuṇḍars choose him from among themselves.[110] The same kottukkārar presides at all the religious activities of the local collectivity.

The two goddess temples are distinguished by their mūlavars. Māriyammaṉ conforms to the customary model, but has only two arms bearing respectively the sword and *kapāla*. Vīrakālī, on the contrary, is more explicitly linked to violent works. Although her four arms bear the habitual weapons, the posture of her legs is remarkable: the right leg is raised on the seat, while the left leg dangles with the foot posed on an anthropomorphic rākṣasa, represented in relief on her socle, lying with its head to her left. It is logical that the festival of Vīrakālī begins a day earlier in order to ensure that the boundaries are guarded. For clarity of exposition, we shall treat the two festivals separately, but while remembering that there is every reason to consider them together.

- *Vīrakāḷiyammaṉ's Temple and Festival*

Vīrakāḷīyammaṉ's sanctuary is very simple, with a sanctum fronted by a maṇḍapa. In front of the entrance, a lion faces the goddess; behind it a balipīṭha and a swing are aligned on the axis. The opening is to the north, as is that of the square enclosure wall that contains a small sanctuary dedicated to an aniconic Karuppurāyaṉ in the northwest corner.

On the first day of the Vīrakālī poṅkalpaṇḍikai, a Tuesday, the kottukkārar summons a gurukkaḷ for the purificatory rites and the initial benediction, the *puṇyavācana*. The paṇḍāram performs an abhiṣeka and then a pūjā to the mūlavar. From the second to the

[110]The *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 1148, s.v. kottukkāraṉ, makes of him a kind of foreman at the head of a group (*kottu*) of workers. Here, the term has a particular local use, but is perhaps only an extension of the common usage. This function can be compared to that of the master of the house receiving services from service castes while on the religious plane being the yajamāna, patron of the sacrifice. In the present case (1981), the man who claimed to exercise this authority, despite his extreme ignorance, succeeded in terrorizing the paṇḍāram, whereas the gurukkal who participated in our interview stood up to him without useless provocation, to the paṇḍāram's great relief.

twelfth day, abhiṣeka and pūjā are repeated morning and evening. On the fifth or seventh day—one can apparently choose—a pot full of water and decorated with nīm, the kumbha, is brought to the temple and placed near the goddess. On the twelfth day, the paṇḍāram, two Mudaliyārs (Ceṅkunta Mudaliyār weavers as in Cennimalai?), and two Piḷḷais (Veḷḷāḷas?),[111] who are the local heads of their castes, go together to the upper temple (that of Subrahmaṇya) to get Vīrakālī's utsavamūrti. They bring her down to the temple in procession, where she is received by a gurukkaḷ from the Śiva temple. The latter installs five kalaśas filled with water, five pāligais (small pots in which seeds are sown), and a fire into which he offers oblations, and he also hoists the goddess's banner. He does pūjā to the kalaśas and ties kaṅkaṇas to the mūlavar, utsavamūrti, the Gaṇeśa from the sanctuary, the lion, the (temporary) banner pole, the balipīṭha, and the paṇḍāram, who receives in addition a sacred thread—the *yajñopavīta* of the twice-born. The paṇḍāram then offers pūjā to the mūlavar and distributes naivedya to the public.

From the thirteenth to the sixteenth day, Vīrakālī's utsavamūrti is taken out in procession around the village. She does the *ūrvalam,* the pradakṣiṇā of the settlement, which follows a course different from the rathavīthi and concerns the settlement's boundaries rather than a symbolic cosmos represented at its center. The festival culminates on the fifteenth day, the ritual complexity of which is staggering.[112]

On the morning of this fifteenth day (consequently a Tuesday), women from four villages (Civaṉmalai being one of them)[113] bring māviḷakkus in groups. At midday, they cook a poṅgal in the temple courtyard. That evening, the kottukkārar leads a mare (which he has hired for the occasion) and stops in front of the swing, facing the goddess. The paṇḍāram washes its legs and puts a poṭṭu on its forehead. He offers a pūjā (ārati, flowers and water: a simple form) to Vīrakālī and to the mare, and the water from the pūjā serves quite naturally to sprinkle the mare. At this moment, the music stops and all wait in silence until the mare shakes her head (to snort?). If the mare does so, it is a good sign for the year. Another pūjā is offered to Vīrakālī and vibhūti is distributed to the public. The mare, led by the kottukkārar, is then taken in procession, while only one of the pūcāris (there must be at least two during the period of the double festival) bears the ornaments of Vīrakālī's mūlavar on a tray. The procession then goes to a tank, where a buffalo waits (purchased with the funds of the collectivity, or donated). The buffalo is bathed and is also given a poṭṭu. From there, the procession again sets out: the mare led by the kottukkārar, the buffalo by the regular paṇḍāram, while another paṇḍāram bears the goddess's ornaments. They proceed through the streets of the village accompanied by musicians to the house of a Brahman, who calls them. This Brahman has Vīrakālī as his *iṣṭadevatā*. The paṇḍāram who carries the ornaments

[111]Mudaliyār and Piḷḷai are titles that can belong to several castes. We hypothesize here according to what is known of the local or regional context.

[112]We shall encounter other examples. Let us note for the sake of memory that the fifteenth day cannot be far from Paṅguṉi-uttiram, an important date in other parts of Tamilnadu, but to which no local informant alluded.

[113]Here also there are thus several ūrs grouped together around this mountain with a double temple, and we can better understand why the configuration drawn by temples to goddesses can be largely theoretical: it symbolically organizes a vaster space on a restricted area. But it is probable that each ūr possesses a secondary replica of the principal sanctuaries in Civaṉmalai.

is the only one to go inside. The Brahman performs pūjā to the tray and places on it a piece of clothing and a jewel for the goddess. He gives food to the buffalo. The procession continues its course through the streets of the village, going toward the northeast. Again the procession halts at a point where the pūcāri "calls all the goddesses," according to the terms of the informants. The rite bears the name *ammai aḻaittal*—"to call *ammai*" (the Ammai? the Ammais?). The place would not appear to be marked by any sign.

Following this mysterious rite, one returns to the temple at the same time as the utsavamūrti, which has made its customary pradakṣiṇā. The utsavamūrti (as well as its ornaments) returns to its sanctuary. The mare is then sent back to its owner, her role having been concluded. As for the buffalo, it is led near to a pit that had been dug during the procession just opposite the goddess and in the presence of the kottukkārar. The paṇḍāram performs a pūjā to Vīrakālī and approaches the buffalo to offer it ārati and sprinkle it with water from the pūjā (from the tīrtha, says the gurukkaḷ). The music is discontinued and one waits for the buffalo to shake its head. Should it not do so, the pūcāri must begin everything once again, starting with the pūjā, until the buffalo finally decides to snort. When it does so, the music immediately breaks out loudly, and the paṇḍāram severs its neck with a single stroke. Both head and body are pushed into the pit and covered with earth. The priest, in trance, falls unconscious to the ground and must be revived with water. It is then that the poṅgal cooked by the women at midday is offered to the goddess along with coconuts and bananas, all of which are returned to them after the worship. This ritual sequence strangely has the name *tiruppu,* which is explained as *māṭu tirupputal,* "to return the cows," while relating this to the *Mahābhārata* (*Virāṭaparvan*) episode in which the cows of King Virāṭa were stolen by the Kauravas and subsequently returned to their owner by Arjuna. This would have taken place in Peruntoḻuvūr.[114] No one seems to have any difficulty in justifying the name of this buffalo sacrifice in this way. The sixteenth and final day is the conclusion, without further surprise, of this one festival that has indeed included several. The banner is lowered, and all the kaṅkaṇas, the sacred thread of the pūcāri, the sprouts in the pāligais, and the kumbha disappear to the bottom of the water.

●● *Analysis: The Mare and the "Calling of the Goddesses"*

To begin with, we shall endeavor to unravel the sequence of the mare and the rite of "calling the goddesses" that this sequence includes. It is unusual to find a female animal figuring in our rituals, much less a mare. This latter element is thus the one that draws our attention. Earlier (above, pp. 87-88) I made a fragile and no doubt somewhat premature comparison between the buffalo offered to the grāmadevatās in Āndhra and the aśvamedha, the royal horse sacrifice par excellence of the solemn Vedic ritual. It was the animal's mandatory wandering, sometimes lasting a year, but also limited to the day of its immolation, that distantly evoked the sacrificial horse. I do not, of course, contend that the sudden appearance of a mare would suffice to take us back to that point, nor

[114]The same episode is also connected, somewhat farther north, to the Arjuneśvara temple in Kaḍattūr. See below.

above all to cast light on the rite now in question. After all, the aśvamedha will always remain obscure in its most central elements. It is thus not very encouraging to have to view matters from this standpoint. Nevertheless, we are called upon to do so, first, by a detail in the treatment of the animal: when it is led to the temple by the person presiding over the entire cult, the priest washes its legs. Now in the aśvamedha, before releasing the horse for a year, it is taken to a pond, and when its legs are in the water, the adhvaryu sprinkles it before arranging for the immolation of a dog, which is thrust in the water between the horse's legs. The dog represents the enemy over whom the horse will be victorious. Next one makes oblations into the fire in connection with the drops of water that the horse will release when it shakes itself.[115] Here, however, the transposition is not immediately obvious: the pūcāri sprinkles the animal prior to its long peregrination around the village, and although there is no blood sacrifice at this time, it is the mare that is treated *as a victim*. One waits for her to shake her head and snort, something that occurs in actual popular rites of immolation as a sign of the animal's acquiescence to the fate being prepared for it. The music falls silent and it is a moment of high tension. But when the animal deigns to shake its head, its gesture is interpreted as an auspicious sign for the year. That this moment imitates the putting to death of the horse is not absurd, for prior to the horse's immolation it is once again led to the pond to the east of the sacrificial area (harnessed to a chariot with three other horses) and enters the water. The adhvaryu and the patron of the sacrifice are on the chariot.[116] Then, once it is tied to the yūpa, the horse is sprinkled with water. It thus appears that there is here a telescoping of the two moments when the horse has its legs in the water and receives a sprinkling on its head. But the scene that follows the aspersion also indicates the preparation of a putting to death—which does not take place. In any case, let us not forget that it is a question of a mare and not of a stallion. Another detail is to be kept in mind: the animal receives a poṭṭu on its forehead. Should this be compared to the poṭṭu of blood put on the kumbha and the pūcāri in trance on the evening of the ninth day of the Mahākālī festival in Cennimalai, after the immolation of a goat (offered by the local collectivity) at the moment when the goddess, in the double form of the possessed priest and the pot, exits the temple to make her round of the village, the pot being then definitively submerged in a tank (above, pp. 161-62)? It will be remembered that this ritual sequence was called *tirukalyāṇam,* as if it were a matter of the goddess's marriage. We shall leave the question pending, since the very identity of the mare is problematic. That a female would be substituted for a male, and that in the last resort a buffalo would be sacrificed, cannot be a simple error or an insignificant whim.

The ritual of the calling the goddesses is uniquely localized by its spatial orientation: it takes place to the locality's northeast. To follow the same thread, the northeast—which is, moreover, the direction of sovereignty—also defines the spatial point outside the sacrificial arena where the sacrificial horse is put to death and where the king's four wives must go immediately afterward. It is the ritual sequence that is both the best known and least clear, since the Yajurveda sūtras that describe it do not entirely agree with one

[115]Cf. Dumont 1927, 26 ff.
[116]Ibid., 152.

another.[117] The mahiṣī, the king's chief wife, must in effect lie down beside the dead horse on a blanket and simulate copulation with it. It is no doubt the obvious difficulty of the performance that entails a very crude exchange of remarks between the mahiṣī and the officiating priests, and between the latter and the other wives of the king. But it is only the beginning of the scene that concerns us here. At the moment when the queen lies down beside the horse, a murmured call is heard: *ambe ambīke'mbālike,* according to the text in *Vājaseneyī-saṃhitā* 23.18d and related sūtras, or, according to TS 7.4.19, *ambe ambālyambike.* Depending upon the Vedic schools, it is sometimes the mahiṣī who complains in calling out to her companions, and sometimes an officiant who addresses the mahiṣī with words that express her own complaint. In all cases, the first word is *ambe,* the vocative of *ambā,* of which the two other terms are diminutives. In Tamil, *ambā* becomes *ammai*, which is the exact term used to designate the rite. *Ammai* is used in this form only to designate goddesses, although the more current term would be *amman*, and secondarily it also denotes the smallpox associated with the goddess. It is clear enough here that "calling the mothers" or "the goddesses," or "the mother," "the goddess," is an echo of the aśvamedha rite that *immediately follows* the immolation of the horse. The actors in the ritual do not know this about what they are doing, or the essential link that Vedic ritual enables one to establish between the aspersion rite and the snorting of the mare on the one hand, and the calling of the goddesses during a halt in the northeastern sector of the processional route on the other. For us, however, this link makes it possible to advance the idea that, at the temple, the mare is really treated symbolically as a victim. Nevertheless, it is not so clear why it is a mare and not a stallion, nor why, finally, there is only a semblance of putting to death.

It does, however, remain true that the first moment of the rite at the temple—ablution of the legs, aspersion of the head—must be considered as a condensation of two moments, separated by one year in the aśvamedha, in which the horse is put in contact with water. Although the mare would then be a kind of victim, her immolation makes way for an oracle, and she then begins a long peregrination around the village that must proceed by way of the northeast. This march could, therefore, symbolize the year of the horse's roaming, a well-protected roaming that is here conducted by the kottukkārar himself, who in this ritual takes on the equivalent of the royal function or of its delegate. This leads to a consideration of the only notable episode occurring between the departure from the temple and the halt in the northeast, namely the visit to the Brahman who "called" the procession; it is specified that this Brahman has Vīrakāḷī for his iṣṭadevatā. Thus at first sight, this could be a contingent feature slipping into the ritual thanks to a private devotion. But let us rather look to the instructions given by the adhvaryu to the young princes who are to accompany the horse during its journey.[118] If on the way they meet a Brahman who does not know of the aśvamedha, then he is not a Brahman

[117]Ibid., 174-76 for the White Yajurveda. But see also *Baudhāyana ŚS* 10.29-30 and ĀpŚS 10.17.12 and 17, which refer to TS 7.4.19. Dumont also gives these texts in his work's appendix. The manner in which western authors have approached these "indecent" passages is particularly amusing. Dumont proceeds gallantly with a great many Sanskrit, Greek, or Latin terms, while Keith (1914) simply informs us in a note that he omits what is "obscene."

[118]Dumont 1927, 38 and ĀpŚS 20.5.15-16.

and they must plunder him without mercy. In "Vedic" terms, we probably have here the form that the Brahman's recognition of the royal power must take, complementary to the payment of tribute by vassal Kṣatriyas. Here the situation is simply reversed. The Brahman "knows" so well that he occasions the goddess's visit, and the latter will enter his house in the form of her ornaments. On the other hand, he feeds the buffalo that will really be sacrificed to the goddess, and not the mare. Apparently then, the mare has no role in this visit; but in fact she is certainly one of its essential elements, since one is en route to the horse sacrifice's symbolic site (where "the calling of the goddesses" will occur). It is to demonstrate his knowledge of the aśvamedha—which becomes a devotion to the goddess—that the Brahman receives three things: the mare's visit, the buffalo's, and the tray containing the goddess's ornaments. In this way he gives witness to the good order that reigns in the locality. But the link between these three remains to be clarified. We have seen that the mare and the buffalo have each received a poṭṭu that could be a poṭṭu of marriage. The symbolic character of the ensemble is certain, but it is for the moment difficult to move forward with the interpretation. Let us note here, as we did with the yūpa, that the aśvamedha, in more than one of its sequences, had to remain largely theoretical, and that this fact only made it more open to mythical utilization in various rituals.[119]

After the "calling of the goddesses," the mare must complete her circuit, but upon arriving at the temple she is sent back to profane life, whereas the buffalo is brought for the first time into the courtyard. The aspersion and the general silence repeat the scene that had marked the mare's departure. But this time, since the putting to death is real, it is necessary to obtain the sign of the victim's acquiescence. Having led the buffalo for the entire procession, the paṇḍāram, when the music breaks out, goes into trance and acts as executioner. But the noteworthy feature of this scene is that he falls unconscious to the ground as soon as the act of slaying has been accomplished and while others push the carcass into the pit. Should one simply see this as the form that the trance takes at that moment? In fact, it is indeed a matter of a ritualized form of trance (one will find it in the same context elsewhere), and we would also like to take account of it. Upon initial consideration, the death of the animal seems to temporarily entail that of the executioner. It would therefore be important to satisfy oneself that in his state of trance, the paṇḍāram personifies the goddess. But isn't the latter the Slayer of the buffalo par excellence, and can there really be any doubt in this regard? Through the entire fifteen-day ritual, there are more suggested deaths than real killings. The mare and the possessed executioner are affected by the buffalo's immolation, the latter more than the former. Incidentally, both side with the feminine, and the mare could be a figure of the goddess. The latter, on the other hand, would thus not be only the slayer of the buffalo.

[119]In Ambakarattūr, near Karaikkal (Pondicherry State) on the east coast, the buffalo sacrifices at the Kālī temple on the eighth day of her festival in Vaikāci (May-June) commemorate the slaying by the goddess of the asura Amban̲, who had two brothers, Ambakan̲ and Ambalakan̲. There also, the Māriyamman̲ festival is practically concomitant with that of Kālī. On the classical side, we obviously evoke the three daughters of the king of Kāśī, Ambā, Ambikā, and Ambālikā, who were abducted by Bhīṣma for his brother Vicitravīrya in the MBh. The fate of Ambā is perhaps not unrelated to the present context. Because she was first engaged to an asura, she remained without a husband and committed suicide in a fire while dedicating herself to Śiva.

She could also have to suffer from this sacrifice, whose traces are made to disappear in the earth. The poṅgal offered to her as food is in any case a sure sign that she takes no pleasure in the sacrifice, and that it was necessary to reduce to a minimum the effusion of blood. This is not the first time that one suspects the goddess of not being fond of the blood she sheds, or whose shedding she brings to pass. We are here quite far from the general tone of the *Devī-Māhātmya*. On the other hand, for whoever is familiar with the MBh, with or without its two hymns to the Goddess, there is more than a mere resonance here. The explicit evocation of the restoration of Virāṭa's cows is also not incongruous: in the battle that Arjuna fights to regain the stolen cows, none of the great Kaurava warriors is killed. It is like a prefiguration, with as little bloodshed as possible (only others are killed), of the war to come.

• *Māriyamman̲*

Now during this time, the same actors along with a few others also celebrate Māriyamman̲ at the neighboring temple. With neither an outer wall nor a subshrine, the goddess of the center has an even more modest sanctuary than the fierce (?) Kālī. But in front of her temple's entrance is a permanent post of shiny black stone (plates 78-79) that could be seen as a somewhat squat liṅga were it not perched upon a square pedestal with five steps. Near its base, several posts of the same appearance, one of which has an octagonal shaft, have an indefinite identity and function. They could be votive replicas of the main post which, for its part, bears the name Tūṇaicāmi (Skt. *Sthūṇāsvāmin*), "the post-god." There is no Kar̲uppu in the shrine, but this new deity could, so to speak, take his place.

•• *Description of the Festival*

The festival takes place in Paṅguni and lasts sixteen days, like that of Vīrakālī, with a one-day lag between them. At Cen̲nimalai, we saw that Mahākālī was celebrated in Mārkal̲i (December-January) at a date near the winter solstice, while Māriyamman̲'s festival was held in Aippaci (October-November), closer to the customary date of the autumnal Durgāpūjā, but appreciably differing from the equinox, while overlapping with the Skandaṣaṣṭhī (above, pp. 164-65). In Civan̲malai, Paṅguni (March-April) is obviously related to the spring equinox, but in distinction from what takes place in other regions of Tamilnadu, there is no important festival at the Subrahmaṇya temple. Between them, the sites at Cen̲nimalai and Civan̲malai mark off three of the four major critical points of the liturgical year. Only the summer solstice appears to be neglected, which is not the case elsewhere; at Kaḍattūr, for instance (see below), this solstice is perhaps marked by the festival of Marudukāl̲iyamman̲ in Vaikāci (May-June). It is unlikely that this distribution of festivals to the goddesses (those to the gods being everywhere the same) between the two sites is simply a matter of chance. Time is liturgically organized like space.

For our present purposes,[120] the description of Māriyamman̲'s tiruvil̲ā immediately presents facts of two orders: on the one hand, the structure of the festival superimposes

[120]So as not to overtax the reader's patience, which we readily admit is severely tested, certain ritual sequences have been simplified; notably, the interventions of the gurukkaḷ, always involving the same āgamic models, are reduced to essentials.

itself exactly on that of the Vīrakālī temple. It presents, in effect, two concentrated times, its twelfth and fifteenth days, which occur on the days following the twelfth and fifteenth days of the poṅkalpaṇḍikai of Vīrakālī. One cannot fail to note this correspondence that is both temporal and structural; the two rituals refer to each other and must be mutually clarified. For the Māriyamman festival, this homology entails a significantly modified development with respect to the Māriyamman festival at Cennimalai. But—and this is the second order of facts—the two celebrations of the goddess of the center nevertheless include the same elements; it is just that they are differently arranged. Once again, there are good reasons to recall the Cennimalai festival when attempting to understand what takes place at Civanmalai; the two Māriyammans (to whom one can eventually add the one considered by Beck [1981]) and their ritual partners must thereby gain in clarity. The approach is twofold and ponderous but could prove to be fruitful.

On the first day, the paṇḍāram goes to inform the villagers of the four ūrs that the festival is to begin (the decision to celebrate it is, in fact, taken earlier by an assembly from the four ūrs, since it is necessary to collect the required funds) and, that evening, Māriyamman receives an abhiṣeka. During the night, and in the same manner until the twelfth day, Mādāris play drums and men come to dance in front of the temple. Throughout this entire initial period, a pūjā is performed mornings and evenings before the goddess.

On the twelfth day, the Kavuṇḍars go to cut a pāccamaram branch that has a forked end similar to an upside-down tripod. They put this post—called the *kambam* (<Skt. *skambha*)—in the teppakkuḷam. On the evening of the same day, the paṇḍāram and kottukkārar go to the upper temple to bring back Māriyamman's utsavamūrti, which they place in the maṇḍapa (onto which the sanctum opens) inside her temple. A gurukkaḷ comes to perform the customary purification and ties kaṅkaṇas to Gaṇeśa (left of the entrance to the garbhagṛha), the two (the permanent and the mobile) Māriyammans, the balipīṭha, and Tūṇaicāmi. Still during the same evening—a good part of this sequence is nocturnal—the paṇḍāram prepares a clay pot, the kumbha, on a copper tray along with small margosa branches, a coconut, bananas, betel and areca, and flowers. Accompanied by the gurukkaḷ, kottukkārar, musicians, and a few villagers, he carries this arrangement to the teppakkuḷam. There, while the pūcāri bathes himself and fills the kumbha with water, the kottukkārar removes the kambam from the water. The post, pot, and tray are set down on the bank of the tank. The gurukkaḷ does a puṇyavācana and ties kaṅkaṇas to the kambam, kumbha, and pūcāri, who also receives a yajñopavīta. The same pūcāri provides himself with a corded *cāṭṭai,* a kind of whip, one end of which is thicker than the other, that he carries on his shoulder. A second pūcāri now enters the scene, but receives neither kaṅkaṇa nor whip. He is responsible for carrying the kambam, while the first paṇḍāram bears the kumbha that is now decorated with margosa and a coconut. They return to the temple to the sound of drums. All along the way, men and women from the village pour water on the feet of the two priests. The kumbha is placed very near to the balipīṭha and the kambam is held vertically beside it. Following a pūjā to Māriyamman, the kottukkārar digs a hole to erect the post just in front of the balipīṭha, that is, on the same axis as the mūlavar in the sanctuary and Tūṇaicāmi. Then he immolates a ram, whose head is put in the hole and then removed. The post is then installed there; it is to this post that the victim has just been offered, it is said, and the latter goes

to the Mādāris. The main pūcāri (the one who bears the kaṅkaṇa, sacred thread, and whip) places the kumbha in the fork of the post and attaches it there with fibers from the central ribs of palmyra branches (*maṭṭai*). Māriyamman receives a dīpārādhanā, after which prasāda is distributed to the public. The kumbha remains fixed in this way for three days, during which Māriyamman is offered pūjā.

On the fifteenth day, women bear māviḷakkus on trays upon which they also arrange a coconut, bananas, and camphor. They have first gathered outside and arrive in procession. They arrange their flour lamps in two rows extending from the goddess to the post, giving the rest—coconuts, etc.—along with a small piece of dough removed from each lamp to the pūcāri, who makes of it an offering to the goddess. The kottukkārar, for his part, brings a live ram before the balipīṭha. The pūcāri sprinkles the animal with water and performs a karpurārati to it. A deep silence falls while waiting for the ram to shake its head. As soon as it does so, the kottukkārar decapitates it. The ram is offered to the goddess, that is, it ultimately goes to the main pūcāri. The blood sacrifice is followed by a dīpārādhanā and the distribution of prasāda. One notes that no part of the animal is presented to the goddess, nor cooked to offer her as food. On the other hand, women from each house of the locale (or from the four ūrs?) return toward midday to prepare poṅgal near the temple. When it is ready, they remove a small quantity that they give to the pūcāri; the latter offers this portion to Māriyamman and, somewhat later, it is he who will eat it. The remainder of the cooked rice is taken by the women to their homes.

In the afternoon, devotees, both men and women, who have made special vows (there can be from twenty to thirty persons) come together at the teppakkuḷam,[121] where they take a ritual bath. From there they leave in procession for the temple, dancing and each carrying a burning pūcaṭṭi. The pots with fire here are smaller than those in Cennimalai and can be carried simply at arm's length. Preceding the procession of pūcaṭṭis, men disguised as Māriyamman also dance. The pots with fire are arranged in front of the goddess at the temple. The pūcāri gives vibhūti to the bearers, who then leave. The pots are left there and the priest will later put them aside after they have long been extinguished. They will have no further use. That evening, Māriyamman's utsavamūrti goes out on procession through the entire village. Upon her return, a solemn pūjā takes place at the temple.

That is when—it is a nocturnal ritual once again—the Tōṭṭi-Mādāri[122] goes to tell all the inhabitants of the village that they must bring water for the kambam. They arrive one after another, each with a pot of water. The kottukkārar brings a new ram (the third), to which the pūcāri does dīpārādhanā and sprinkles it with water. Silence falls and one waits. When the ram shakes its head, the kottukkārar immolates it at the kambam. The priest then unties the kumbha from the post and goes to place it in front of the goddess's mūlavar, prostrating himself before her. Then, with the whip on his shoulder, he puts a garland of the goddess around his neck, enters a trance, and proceeds to uproot the post. During this operation, those in attendance pour water from

[121]It is a square tank where, every year, the brahmotsava rite of the double temple takes place; Subrahmanya and his wives are taken out on a raft.

[122]That is, the Paṟaiyar who functions as scavenger.

their pots over the kambam and pūcāri. The latter, having put the ram's head in the hole, crushes it with the post. The hole is filled, the head remaining at the bottom, while the body of the victim goes to the Paṟaiyar scavenger. The pūcāri, bearing the whip and garland and still in trance, takes the post and goes once around the temple with an assistant, the kottukkārar, and the drummers; from there they proceed to the teppak-kuḷam where the post is submerged. There the pūcāri also leaves his kaṅkaṇa, bathes, and then returns to the temple for a dīpārādhanā to the goddess and a final distribution of prasāda to the public. While doing so, the sixteenth and last day has arrived, upon which the pūcāri must take his meal at the kottukkārar's house. The kumbha that had been placed in front of the goddess is then removed, at no particular time and without special ritual, as are the pūcaṭṭis. The same persons who had brought it down from the hilltop then take the utsavamūrti back to the Subrahmaṇya temple.

●● *Analysis*

At first glance, this ritual seems less "satisfying" than the one at Cennimalai (or the one at Kannapuram [Beck 1981]), since there is not the same alternation of the pot of water and the pot of fire; indeed, these two no longer bear a direct relation to each other. Moreover, there is no moment at which the erection of the post and the fixing of the kumbha into its upper fork are likened to a marriage. Furthermore, the goddess permanently bears a tāli and is thus considered to be married. But even with an evident difference in the treatment of their respective bearers, it remains no less the case that the procession that leads the kumbha and post together to the temple is open to the same interpretation as at Cennimalai: the kumbha on the post is like a temporary marriage of the goddess with the post. For the identification of the pot of water with the goddess continues to be clear throughout the ritual.

We can, however, turn the apparent impoverishment of the ritual to advantage. On the one hand, the abundant use of water is completely dissociated from fire. Water is poured on the feet of the pūcāris who bear the pot of water and the post in the procession to the temple; again, it is necessary to inundate the priest who, while in trance, embodies the goddess, and the kambam that he removes from its hole when the "cohabitation" of the post and the pot has ended. Ultimately, only the kambam is submerged, while the pot remains as if forgotten in the sanctuary. At no time is there any question of soothing with water the burning of the fire. On the other hand, it is difficult to consider the pots with fire as incarnating the same personage as the kumbha but in a different state, the burning of wrath alternating with the cooling of the margosa and the water in the pot (Beck's hypothesis).

Let us then return to the rite of the pūcaṭṭis. The procession sets out from the same tank as the kumbha and the kambam do on the twelfth day; the participants are voluntary, motivated by individual vows, but dancers costumed as Māriyamman precede them. Even though the pots are smaller, holding them at arm's length must not be very agreeable, despite the dancing. We are taken back to the practices in Tanjavur, to the votive ritual tortures of which firewalking was one of the essential forms. The goddess also opened the firewalk, and was even accompanied there by a pot with fire (above, p. 117). Here, the fire is no longer beneath the feet, but in the devotees' hands. The goddess herself is always in the lead in the form of males dressed as females, associated with a

burning that is offered to her, but from which she must no longer directly suffer. The pūcaṭṭi is transformed for her into an oblation that she can receive in her sanctuary without harmful consequences. What has changed is her position in relation to the fire: from the victim of torture that she appeared to be in Cennimalai, she has become the sovereign deity, and her pūcāri provides himself with a whip to incarnate her in trance. Yet it is a matter of the same goddess, and the procession of her utsavamūrti through the village always expresses the same ultimate victory over all forms of evil. Should we dare to modify this formulation and specify that it is not her position relative to just any fire that has changed, but that this fire is the fire of the sacrifice? Here, the goddess would have already traversed the sacrifice—perhaps that of war, as in the fire-walk—when the rite of the pūcaṭṭis unfolds.

One element of the twelfth day's ritual catches our attention: the kumbha carried from the teppakkuḷam is firmly attached to the post for three days, whereas it could remain on its own in the three-branched fork at the top of the post. The vegetal cord used to tie the goddess-as-pot to the kambam could also be a sign that in this position, wife or not, she is a sacrificial victim, a sign that the whip carried by her pūcāri reinforces,[123] even if this remains to be clarified. But the fifteenth-day rite of the pūcaṭṭis immediately precedes the sequence in which the kumbha will be untied and the kambam sent to the tank after a final blood sacrifice—one that would be at a lower level than its predecessor, taking into account the status of the scavenger who receives the animal. In any case, the post is thrown into the water by the goddess who is herself embodied in her pūcāri in a state of trance.

One also observes that the head of the ram offered to the kambam is twice put in the hole that is dug for it. The first time, it is removed in order to install the post; the second time, the post is used to crush it before it is finally buried. The first act remains symbolic, perhaps to allow a good insertion of the kambam into the hole. The second is effective. One does not limit oneself to burying the head—which is also done to the head of the buffalo in some places. So the act of crushing must have a ritual signification. One thinks naturally of the grinding of grain with the pestle and mortar; here the kambam would quite readily represent the pestle. At the same time, the link between this new kind of pestle and the crushed head is evident, since the one takes the place of the other: the head as victim substitutes for the kambam that, for its part, disappears in a concluding submersion. At Cennimalai, we saw Kambattu-Karuppu put in the hole in place of the post. At Kannapuram (Beck 1981, 91, 95), a goat's head is crushed in a hole, then the Kambattu-Karuppaṉaṉ of stone is put there to remain in place for the entire year, as in Cennimalai. Quite obviously Karuppu must be included in the relationship that unites the animal and the kambam. But the rite of crushing the head does not thereby become any clearer.

We shall at this point venture an hypothesis that can only be confirmed when encompassed in a wider interpretation and illuminated by other ritual variants (see below). The Vedic victim par excellence who is subjected to a rite of crushing is soma, the eponymous mythical king of the lunar dynasty who is perpetually substituted for the real king

[123]On the whip and its interpretation, see above, pp. 21, 27-30, 88-90, 105-6.

during the great royal sacrifices. To be sure, the leap from the pressing of soma to the crushing of a ram's head would require several relays for one to consider it as an hypothesis and see a certain isomorphism in it. These relays exist and can be set forth according to two major axes. One follows the epic, that is, a "classical" path—and the Vīrakālī festival is given an explicit rapport with a MBh site. The other leads precisely to the ritual of the goddess of the boundary that unfolds in parallel to the rituals for Māriyamman̲.

This is not the place to give an interpretation of the whole development of the epic's eighteen days of war, but let us recall from it what pertains to our inquiry. In the epic combats, putting the enemy to death by crushing his head is extremely rare. Nearly without exception, it applies only to Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna and Subhadrā, whom the son of Duḥśāsana kills with a final blow on the head with a mace.[124] Abhimanyu is the incarnation of Soma or Somavarcas, and it is his son who will be the heir of the Somavaṃśa. But one can also place in evidence a parallel feature in the death of Duryodhana: Bhīma breaks Duryodhana's thighs with his mace (MBh 9 58 [57]), and it is possible that this already alludes to the soma pressing, although the symbolism can be more readily connected with the destruction of Duryodhana's sovereignty on Earth. However, the scene that follows this fatal blow is less easily explained, unless one confines oneself to psychological commentaries on the brutality of Bhīma. At 9.59.12 [58.12], one sees the latter shoulder his mace and put his left foot on Duryodhana's head. No doubt it is a gesture intended to humiliate the enemy, but that would not justify the use of the verb *pramṛd*—"to press," "to crush"—which is used unexpectedly since Duryodhana is still alive and does not die from the treatment, and which is used again (reduced to its root, *mṛd:* 59.16 [58.15]) just afterward by Yudhiṣṭhira, who disapproves. But is Duryodhana not also one of the claimants to the succession of the lunar dynasty, precisely the one in question who can be dethroned thanks to the war? We can thus refer to him as another of the epic's somic victims. The epic thus provides a precious landmark in the series (?) of transformations that leads from the pressing of the Vedic soma to the crushing of the head of a goat or ram in a hole. This passage by way of the battlefield in particular makes it possible to situate the somic victim at the two extremities of a hierarchy of values. Abhimanyu is the incarnation of the eponymous king, the royal transposition of the cosmic Puruṣa of ṚS 10.90, while Duryodhana is the asuric usurper whom one must eliminate, a devalorized victim in a certain way, at the same time as he is redeemed by his death in battle. Is this not also what emerges with Pōtu Rāju: a demonic royal status, yet redemption by way of sacrificial death?

But what is a somic victim, an echo of a soma pressing, doing here? We must return to the parallel ritual of Vīrakālī. It was on the day before this "pressing" of the ram's head that the buffalo sacrifice—in which we thought we discerned an imitation of the aśvamedha—took place at the boundary temple. This is not a simple temporal sequence, a juxtaposition of two rites without significance. On the contrary, it is the articulation of the two days' relation to each other that is illuminating. Above all, one must under-

[124]MBh 7.49 (48). The interpretation of the death of Abhimanyu is here taken from Hiltebeitel 1976, 337 ff., who very well perceived that this heir to the lunar dynasty was the somic victim and that the term *soma* designated the moon at the same time as the victim-plant of the soma sacrifice.

stand that Vīrakālī, a "bellicose" form of Kālī if that is not redundant, is only one of the forms of the Goddess who at the center of the village and in the position of sovereign is called Māriyamman̲. Let us note that this conforms to the myth of the *Devī-māhātmya* which, although absent from this region, nevertheless indicates a permanent structure intrinsic to the Goddess: she must issue forth inferior forms of herself in order to accomplish certain tasks in her battle against the demons, beginning with the Buffalo. Kālī is her sanguinary form, the one who must collect the blood of Raktabīja in the DM. Here she is at the boundary, at the outposts of the combat against the enemy who, by definition, comes from outside. It is her triumph that the buffalo sacrifice/aśvamedha celebrates. Maintaining an isomorphism in the broader sense of the term between the Vedic ritual and the double ritual of the goddesses in Civan̲malai, the link is then clearer between the death of the buffalo/horse and the crushing of the head of the ram/soma on the following day. Every aśvamedha is in effect inscribed within the three days of the soma pressing,[125] and the last day continues through the night. On this basis, Māriyamman̲'s rapport with fire in the rite of the pūcaṭṭis on the final day becomes clear; she is now beyond this fire, she has triumphed and can no longer be tortured since she has offered her victim in her place. This is also why she must be untied from the post upon which she is bound in the form of the kumbha so as to substitute the post/ram for it in the role of victim. The two festivals as an ensemble would be a kind of aśvamedha in which the sacrificing king is replaced by the sovereign goddess—the mare led by the kottukkārar is a representation of her. The putting to death of the main victim, the horse—which has become a buffalo—is appropriately accomplished on the boundaries of the agglomeration, while the "soma pressing"—the crushing of the ram's head—takes place on the sacrificial precinct itself, that is, at the center of the village.

A supplementary element is to be included in this dossier: in the classical rite, after the conclusion of the horse sacrifice and the purificatory bath, there are still a few victims to be immolated, about which not everyone agrees. For our purposes, one choice stands out,[126] that of a large post with three branches, the *viśālayūpa,* to which are attached three goats: one consecrated to Agni, a second to Indra and Agni, and the third to the Aśvins, according to information provided by TS 5.6.22. This post seems to be larger than the others and is erected to the east of the central post of the horse sacrifice, facing the āhavanīya fire. The victims and deities addressed can vary. In the context of the aśvamedha, the viśālayūpa is not included in the aśvamedha-soma pressing sequence. It appears at the very end of the ritual and is formally distinguished from all others, to the extent that the post with three branches could for a long time remain connected with the horse sacrifice with a certain fluctuation in the collective consciousness. Here, it is connected with a "soma pressing" at the same time as with the forced "marriage" of the goddess, and its identity is certainly more complex than in the classical rite. In any case, it is not just a post and must be overdetermined like the others. We have no details regarding the viśālayūpa's erection, but the paradigm for such erections (see above, pp. 35-38) emphasizes the watering of the post and its base, perhaps intended to make it

[125]The same structure may be found in the battle recounted in the MBh. Cf. Biardeau 1985-86.
[126]Cf. Dumont 1927, 285.

grow. The comparison of Māriyamman's post with the Vedic yūpa thus leads one to relate the water to the post, rather than to the burning fire, and perhaps facilitates the semantic shift to the asuric animal, fond of water.

In the last resort, the obscure elements remain the same: on the one hand the pūcaṭṭis and their variable link to the goddess, on the other the kambam. Among the myths collected by B. Beck in the region, one finds the story of the young Brahman woman and the seducer-husband of low caste (1981, 95). In Civanmalai, it seems, despite informants' silence on this point, that the kumbha placed on the post returns to the theme of this marriage, which appears plainly at Kannapuram and Cennimalai. If it is not more explicit, that is because it is occulted (unconsciously!) by the way the aśvamedha has come to serve as the organizing schema, and because the "marriage" of the victim is alluded to rather in the Vīrakālī festival during the rite of "calling the goddesses" (above, pp. 174-76). On the other hand, the "marriage" of Mahākālī at Cennimalai remains unexplained (above, pp. 161-63) in a context where the goddess with the lion is also already considered to be married. Finally one would like to clarify the link that remains between the real sacrifice of the buffalo—which is buried—and the final submersion of the post, not to mention the importance of water in the rites concerning the kambam. One also retains the possibility of a further rapport (at Kannapuram and Cennimalai) with a Karuppu represented by a minuscule stone post, and (at Civanmalai) with Tūṇaicāmi. We are obviously tempted to see in these diverse elements—post, Karuppu, Tūṇaicāmi—so many figures of the Buffalo. But we shall see that it is not so simple and that it would be better not to rush to a conclusion.

●● *Reṇukā's Mythology*

In effect, the only element of myth collected in situ points in an entirely different direction and requires an additional detour. To define Māriyamman as a married goddess, the gurukkaḷ informant had an illuminating formula that must be transcribed as it is: *yamadagni-munivarcamcāram-rēṇukātēvi*. The scarcely Tamilized Sanskrit is easily recognized: *Jamadagnimunisaṃsāra-Reṇukādevī*. She is "Reṇukā (*devī* does not necessarily have the sense of "goddess"), wife of the muni Jamadagni." We always knew this, but the identity of Māriyamman and Reṇukā in this form casts new light on the ritual, in particular on the obscure pūcaṭṭis whose relationship to the goddess changes meaning from one place to another. We shall first focus on the term *muni*, the "ascetic Brahman,"[127] because Mahākālī at Cennimalai has before her a very sanguinary muni who is bathed in the blood of the victims offered to him (see above, pp. 162-63).[128] But the proper name of this muni is also worth our attention if we agree to take it word for word: *jamad-agni*, "devouring fire" (perhaps literally, "he who advances" continually consuming all). Not only is one referred to the epic-purāṇic myth of Reṇukā (and to all the mythical forms that this destructive fire assumes), but the ritual implies a veritable interpretation of the myth, rather than a transposition. It is, of course, impossible to specify which version of the myth best accounts for the ritual, but it is

[127]More precisely, the Brahman who has made a vow of silence.

[128]One notes in passing that in the aśvamedha, one makes oblation into the fire with the blood of the horse collected in one of its hooves.

striking that one would have to search among the more classical versions, rather than the popular versions that include the intervention of an "untouchable" woman and the transposition of the two severed heads.[129] Of course, one knows that myth and rite do not evolve hand in hand to correspond term for term; we have here an additional example. But at the same time, the so-called popular ritual bears witness to a quite extraordinary knowledge of the so-called classical myth, which once again poses the problem of the relation between high and low in the social hierarchy. Let us rather say that one sees a real communication functioning here, without our being able to specify dates or modalities.

Let us then take up the story of Reṇukā[130] once again according to the only version in the MBh (3.115-17 [id.]) that mentions her explicitly, since in a text always centered on Rāma Jāmadagnya, she is not named in the second epic version of the latter's story (XII 49 [id.]). It will, however, be worth seeing what is substituted for her in this second account. We shall concentrate the exposition on the pertinent passages of this myth without seeking to introduce them into the total structure of what is already an avatāra myth. Rāma Jāmadagnya is none other than Paraśurāma, one of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu. In MBh 3.115-17,[131] the Brahman Jamadagni, a Bhārgava whose mythical ancestor has in any case a relation to fire,[132] is the son of the Brahman Ṛcīka and of the princess Satyavatī. Ṛcīka, in order to obtain this girl, had to submit to the princely demands of her father, who had asked the gift of a thousand white horses with black ears.[133] Ṛcīka procured these horses from Varuṇa, the god of waters, who gave them to him on the bank of the Ganges. Bhṛgu, Ṛcīka's father, then went to see his son and daughter-in-law and granted the latter a double boon, one for herself and one for her mother, the princess-wife of King Gādhi. It is a question of a double rite of conception, one that will enable the mother to bring into the world a pure Kṣatriya, and the daughter, princess wife of a Brahman, to give birth to a perfect Brahman. Unfortunately, the two women make a mistake and reverse the ritual instructions, with the result that King Gādhi's son will be the problematical Viśvāmitra, the Kṣatriya who consumes himself performing austerities in order to become a Brahman, while Satyavatī gives birth to Jamadagni. Apprised of the error, Satyavatī got her father-in-law to stipulate that the Kṣatriya virtues be deferred to her grandson rather than being given to her son. But Jamadagni retains in himself enough of the kṣatra residue absorbed by his mother to presage the future of his fifth son, Rāma Jāmadagnya, the heir of this formidable "mixture of varṇas." His name is already an entire program, and behold, he repeats the major error of his father by also marrying a princess, Reṇukā.[134] With her he has five

[129]See above, pp. 112 ff., for the classical account and its popular prolongations. The two women reappear as a duality in two goddesses.

[130]Cf. also Biardeau 1970. I do not return to my article on "The Decapitation of Renukā in the Myth of Paraśurāma" (1969), which I consider to be out of date.

[131]But cf. also *Bhāgavata-purāna* 9.15, *Renukāmāhātmya*.

[132]Cf. *Brhaddevatā* 5.97-101 (1965, 2nd ed.), vol. 1, p. 57 and vol. 2, p. 191.

[133]This corresponds to the ideal description of the sacrificial horse.

[134]We could also expound at length on her name. The suffix *-ka* often has a pejorative value in names constructed for the needs of myth. *Renu* is synonymous with *rajas* and, above all when applied to a princess, can have several connotations. It refers to the guṇa *rajas* which denotes the activity proper to Prakrti and to

sons, of whom the last, Rāma, is the most important—says this version without being more specific. Reṇukā, one day while bathing in the river, saw a prince who sported there with his wife, bearing all the signs of wealth and pleasure. She is seriously tempted by this scene, which doubtlessly stirs memories from her days as a princess and evokes all she has lost by marrying a Brahman ascetic lost in his tapas. Her clairvoyant husband divines what has happened and, in his anger, orders his five sons, one after the other, to kill their mother. The first four, as true Brahmans, decline and fall unconscious under their father's curse, but Rāma—whose nonbrahmanic propensities are contained in a single epithet: *paravīrahan,* "slayer of enemy warriors"—takes his axe and decapitates his mother. Jamadagni immediately regains his composure and offers his son a boon in return, upon which the latter requests his mother's and his brothers' resurrection. Apparently unrelated to all this, Arjuna Kārtavīrya, king of the *anūpa,* the "marshy regions" (116.19), arrives at Jamadagni's hermitage, refuses the hospitality offered to him, devastates trees and makes off with the calf of Jamadagni's cow Homadhenu, who supplies Jamadagni with the requirements for his oblations of clarified butter into the fire. When Rāma returns to his parents, he hears the cow's moaning and, consumed by anger, proceeds to slay Kārtavīrya with his bow, for this Brahman has not only an axe but, as a true Kṣatriya would, he also has a bow. The sons of Kārtavīrya avenge their father by killing Jamadagni, which provokes Rāma to exterminate the entire kṣatra and offer a blood oblation to his ancestors (117.6-10), who prevent him from completing this gesture. He offers a great sacrifice, gives land to the officiating priests and a golden altar to Kaśyapa (117 11-12), and retires to Mount Mahendra. Let us add, to help in deciphering this account, that in the late *Reṇukā-māhātmya,* it is at times impossible to distinguish Reṇukā from the cow (both are *devī*), and that the latter has a remarkable ability to defend herself by producing armies from her body.

Reṇukā's husband, he who is "flamboyant" with tapas, thus reproaches his wife, in short, for letting her memory of her kṣatra origins intrude upon her marriage to a Brahman. But is it not already this mixture that he himself bears and that is found hypostatized in his wife—but also in his cow? The mixture of varṇas that is germinal in him, and that develops its implications in Rāma, is thus transferred to his wife, who, one understands, must be a princess in order to bear this mixture. She is a figure of the Earth doomed to disorder by the confusion of varṇas, and the vertigo she experiences at the sight of a royal couple is the logical result of this disorder and a prelude to her death. Separated from the kṣatra and given to the Brahman, she can only die. The episode of her decapitation is thus only the metaphorical announcement of all that follows. The abusive Kṣatriya does not respect the Brahman and deprives the cow of its calf to cause it suffering and thereby perturbs the very source of brahmanical power. The warrior-Brahman Rāma puts the errant Kṣatriya to death. His sons kill Jamadagni. And Rāma kills the entire kṣatra indispensable for the earth's survival. There is a veiled equivalence between Reṇukā and the cow: the Brahman can no more sacrifice without his wife than without a cow, and the first victim of the disorder of the varṇas is the wife

the Goddess, but it also suggests feminine impurity at the same time as the dust that obscures space or the smoke that dulls the brilliance of the sacrificial fire.

or the cow. The massacre of which she is the point of departure implies for her a veritable death, followed by a revival.

We can now confront this situation with the ritual. Māriyamman-Reṇukā (+ Kālī) is this woman, or this cow (or the mare-Kālī) who, in the sociocosmic disorder, is a victim of two masters: the Brahman husband burning with an excess of asceticism and rage who tortures her, and the demented Kṣatriya who assumes a right over her and asserts it by force. When it is maintained that there is a marriage between Māriyamman and the post, there is no doubt that reference is made to the popular version of the myth of Kāttavarāyan (= Arjuna Kārtavīrya) according to which he takes possession of a Brahman woman by force. When the marriage is disregarded, there is only the recollection of the association of Kāttavarāyan with the impalement stake upon which he is tortured. It will be remembered that the link with the goddess varies. But here it is never a question of Kāttavarāyan, and if the post can be identified with anyone, it is only with Karuppu. In Tanjavur, where the two "demons" were associated, Karuppu was somewhat more removed. Here only Karuppu is known, but with traits that relate him . . . to the epic Kārtavīrya. The latter, in effect, is king of the marshy regions, the *anūpa,* which makes him inferior in terms of the epic's vision of the geographical distribution of the dharma. Although it does not appear in the version of 3.115-17, it is otherwise known[135] that his capital is Māhiṣmatī, the name of which is a clear echo of *mahiṣa,* "the buffalo," as well as of *mahiṣī,* a king's "main wife." His profile is always that of a demonic king who is the enemy of gods and Brahmans. But although it is quite easy to account for the shift from Kāttavarāyan(-Kārtavīrya) to Karuppu, it would be premature to identify Karuppu and the buffalo. We shall only observe for the present that both of them are fond of the mire of marshes.[136]

In any case, the position of Reṇukā (+ the cow) between the pūcaṭṭi and the post becomes clearer: the princess is caught between two men, a Brahman whose anger is great enough to torture his wife, and a prince who above all has a grudge against her husband, but for whom she incarnates the power of this irascible Brahman. In one of the forms of the ritual, she is tortured by this husband whom the man she possesses must extinguish in his two arms in the form of a pot containing fire,[137] and in the other, having come to the end of a victorious buffalo sacrifice-aśvamedha, she has endured this ordeal and her devotees imitate her torture. To the extent that her Brahman husband acts as a warrior through the agency of his son Jāmadagnya, she is also a victim

[135]See MBh 3.152.3 ff. (137.2 ff.), where Kārtavīrya refuses to be convinced by Vāyu, messenger of the gods, of the superiority of Brahmans. It is known that Vāyu, the wind, is capable of changing a fire into a conflagration.

[136]For example, MBh 9.58.33b (57.30b): *anyonyaṃ jaghnatur vīrau paṅkasthau mahiṣāviva*, "they fought against each other like two buffalo in muddy water."

[137]The gesture of the embracing of the pot by the possessed man, which will be seen again later, is probably not a gratuitous form of ritual torture without relation to the myth. It is not Renukā, but the princess Satyavatī, mother of Jamadagni, who had to embrace an udumbara (*Ficus glomerata* [Roxb.]) trunk in order to conceive her Brahman son, but who finally embraced the trunk of a pipal as had been prescribed for her mother in order to conceive a Ksatriya son (MBh 3.115.35). The two women inverted the trees, and the disastrous consequences of this error are known (see just above). Incidentally, the two impregnating trees are both *Ficus* trees with milky sap.

of the oppressive Kṣatriya. The two adharmic personages are rigorously complementary and they confront each other around the cow: princess and cow are the two equally complementary aspects of the same victim, the Earth. When the cow is wronged, brahmanic power is violated and Jamadagni is killed; only a warrior Brahman can then rid the Earth of this bane, a delinquent kṣatra. It is an end of the world in which the Earth dies to be reborn to a restored order. The oppressive Kṣatriya is here figured by the post (elsewhere by the asuric Buffalo), which refers to a regulated sacrifice. MBh 3.117.9-11 alludes to a great sacrifice offered by Rāma Jāmadagnya in which he goes to the length of offering to his ancestors the blood of the Kṣatriyas in five pits.

The version of the same myth given in MBh 12.49 [ibid.] frames itself between two aśvamedhas. Reṇukā is not even mentioned, but Jamadagni has a son, *rāmaṃ kṣatriya-hantāram pradīptam iva pāvakam,* "Rāma the slayer of Kṣatriyas who is equal to a blazing fire." The first aśvamedha, however, is performed by Arjuna Kārtavīrya, a powerful and very pious king who—like Rāma himself in 3.117, and here at 12.49.64—gives the entire earth to the Brahmans as a sacrificial honorarium. Immediately, this mytheme—it is known that such a gift is forbidden, for it would amount to the abandonment of royal power by the Kṣatriyas and the assumption of power by the Brahmans[138]—is made explicit by what follows: the thirsting Fire comes to ask alms of Kārtavīrya who allows it to burn everything to ashes—villages, towns, livestock, mountains, and forests, without sparing the hermitage of the pure Brahman Vasiṣṭha.[139] The latter curses Kārtavīrya, who will have to perish at the blows of Rāma. The king is not troubled, so complete are his reverence for Brahmans and his magnanimity. But the curse punishes him where he has sinned: he gave free rein to this destructive fire—a new *jamad-agni*—everywhere on earth (cf. Reṇukā tortured), and his sons steal the calf of Jamadagni's cow, entailing the same infernal process and the same actors. When Rāma Jāmadagnya has completed his massacre of the Kṣatriyas, he performs an aśvamedha in his turn (12.49.64) and gives the earth to Kaśyapa, who exiles Rāma to the seaboard in order to save "the remainder" of the Kṣatriyas. Before regaining her kings, the Earth sinks in the ocean under the weight of disorder.

We have here a new presentation of fire devouring everything in its path, that is, another form of the Reṇukā-Jamadagni couple. But the interest lies in seeing it unleashed by the sacrificial activity itself, by an aśvamedha that concludes with the world's end, which occurs twice. The complementary personages are this time Kārtavīrya and Jāmadagnya, and these two great sacrificers are equally catastrophic for the Earth in violating the norms assigned to their respective modes of conduct. The aśvamedha is thus a fundamental theme in the account, even should it not be named as such in 3.117, where the blood offerings to the ancestors could, however, always designate it indirectly. The association between the myth of Jamadagni and the solemn ritual of the aśvamedha is, moreover, very ancient: ŚPB 13.2.2.14 prescribes the recitation of verses called Jāmadagnī just prior to the putting to death of the horse, "because Jamadagni is Prajāpati." These verses are given in *Vājasaneyī-saṃhitā* 29.25-36 and are taken in

[138]Cf. ŚPB 13.7.1.14-15.

[139]Cf. the conflagration of the Khāṇḍava forest where, however, the Pāṇḍava Arjuna and Krsna spare the Brahman (MBh 1.222. ff. [214 ff.]).

order from RS 10.110.1-2, 7.2.2, and 10.110.3-11.[140] Indeed, RS 10.110 is attributed to Jamadagni or Rāma Jāmadagnya, while RS 7.2 would have Vasiṣṭha, son of Mitra-Varuṇa, as its author. The verses drawn to serve as ritual formulae are thus addressed either to the fire and the pieces of wood that feed it, or to other entities in the solemn ritual.[141] One knows that the paternity of the hymns of the RS was established late in the *Anukramaṇī* of Śaunaka, and that the epic myth, this *Anukramaṇī,* and the classical ritual of the aśvamedha cannot be given even relative dates (Śaunaka himself is a personage in the frame-myth of the Mbh, connected with the Naimiṣa forest, as in KS 10.6). These references to the Revelation and to Vedic practice show that the name Jamadagni had from the beginning the entire semantic value given it in the ritual of the goddesses today, which justified his association with the very sanguinary aśvamedha. One also finds Vasiṣṭha there and his associations with Varuṇa and water (he is called Āpava in MBh 12.49.42).

It is, therefore, not surprising to see a sequence from the aśvamedha resurgent in the Vīrakālī festival, even if it should be necessary to account for its transformation into a buffalo sacrifice to the goddess. This particular ritual supposes in advance the spilling of much Kṣatriya blood along the path of the wandering horse, and in any case the horse sacrifice resonates with the end of the world because of the hemorrhage of the kṣatra that accompanies it. It retains an echo of all battles that had to be fought. The play between fire and water in the ritual can also be read on different levels. The fire of the Brahman's wrath implies that the power he can gain through the fire of his tapas can reach dangerous heights. And the marsh where the bad prince lives places him in a region reputed to be both insalubrious and unfavorable to dharma, as opposed to the dry *jāṅgala,* the paradigm of which is Kurujāṅgala (Rāma Jāmadagnya offers his blood libations at Kurukṣetra, which is all or part of this Kurujāṅgala). Yet within the cosmic dimensions of this sacrificial frame, the fire is also that of the burning of the world, which produces the reabsorption of beings into Brahman (-Nārāyaṇa), while the water could be that of the deluge that announces the re-creation. Also, the horse and the buffalo are opposed. One exemplifies dry and semidesert regions (Sindh), the other the marshy zones. Here is seen the incipient possibility of a semantic shift from the horse to the buffalo in which the horse becomes the prerogative of the sovereign goddess, while the buffalo is definitively doomed to the status of an asura or an inferior but indispensable deity.

- *Complementarity of the Goddesses*

Finally, I must underscore the complementarity of the two goddesses and of their two festivals. It is no doubt strange upon initial consideration that the buffalo sacrifice would take place at the boundary temple, which has no sacrificial post, while the motif of the

[140]References in Dumont 1927, 167.

[141]The Black Yajurveda, believed to be older, does not appear to make use of the same mantras, as far as I know. But the TS knows the close link between Jamadagni and Viśvāmitra (the latter is the former's maternal uncle in the epic), and the rivalry of the two with Vasiṣṭha. See notably TS 3.1.7 in Keith 1967, vol. 1, 230, and Macdonell and Keith 1967, vol. 1, 276, s.v. Jamadagni. One would be tempted to see in the use of the Jāmadagnī verses a ritual development of the White Yajurveda witnessing to the building of the epic myth.

ritual post would appear near the goddess at the center, replicated by a permanent post (Kaṟuppu, Tūṇaicāmi). I defer an analysis of this dissociation, whose terms will call for partial modification after we consider the rituals in Dhārāpuram and in its environs. On the other hand, one can now see in this juxtaposition one of the precise manifestations of the complementarity between the two festivals. It is a precious tool that we have already used considerably, and we can now return with it to the ritual of Mahākālī at Cennimalai (above, pp. 160-64).

In this village, the two goddesses are not celebrated at the same time and the two rituals are not superimposable. One could thus at first glance consider them to be non-complementary. One will recall that Māriyamman is temporarily married there to the kambam, and that Mahākālī, goddess of the boundary, is fronted by an anthropomorphic but "terrible" Muṉiyappaṉ. The ninth day, that of the goddess's "marriage," articulates itself between two major blood sacrifices separated by an indeterminate number of votive sacrifices performed by one and the same Nāḍar executioner. The common feature of all these goat immolations (there is no buffalo) is that they take place in front of Muṉiyappaṉ, upon whom the victims' blood is poured. The first goat of the morning is offered by the muppattukkārar who takes it away to his house, while the women of his household offer a poṅgal to the goddess. In the evening, the pūcāri places a garland of the goddess around his neck before attending to the kumbha filled with water, a temporary representation of the goddess. The pūcāri then enters a trance, and when he leaves the temple to submerge the kumbha in the tank from which he brought it, the Nāḍar immolates the goat offered by the local collectivity. A poṭṭu of blood is put on the pot and on the possessed man, apparently as a sign of marriage, since it is a matter of the marriage rite of the goddess. The goddess is already married, in any case, and it could be thought that this tirukalyāṇam is only the annual renewal of the union of the goddess and her husband, necessitated by all that separates them in the course of the year. The sanguinary nature of the nuptial rite and the identity of the husband were considered earlier (above, pp. 162 ff.). In Cennimalai, Māriyamman is also the wife of Jamadagni, and the pūcaṭṭi is her angered husband chastising her by a torture. There is no reason to doubt that Mahākālī would also be a form of the same goddess here, and that Muṉiyappaṉ would be the scarcely affable figure of this murderous husband: the goddess suffers because she has a Brahman husband with warrior propensities, and what she suffers symbolizes the disorder of the world. In the blood that drenches Muṉiyappaṉ throughout the day, one can recognize the vile blood oblation that his son Jāmadagnya makes to his dead father, and the poṭṭu of blood on the goddess recalls that she must also suffer and disappear (she will be submerged) because of this disorder. One can thus limit the cāmiyāḍi to his role as the goddess's possessed, and Muṉiyappaṉ can be identified as the latter's husband. Taking into account the respective dates of the two festivals, Māriyamman's being celebrated two months before Mahākālī's, one can also see a certain complementarity in the treatment of Jamadagni. At the temple in the center he is the torturer-husband represented by the pūcaṭṭi. At the boundary temple, he has undergone death himself and the blood he receives is the *tarpaṇa* of the rite for the ancestors, whence his position in front of the goddess. At the same time, this is to recognize Muṉiyappaṉ-Jamadagni as an asuric divinity, the sacrificed and redeemed demon inferior to the goddess, for whom he henceforth stands guard. In fact, his

representation makes this Muṉiyappaṉ a true rākṣasa, one of those demons of Brahman status who are always the symptom of a disorder on earth in the equilibrium of the varṇas. It is only logical that he must, in relation to the Earth-Goddess, assume a role analogous to that of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, since they represent two faces of the same disorder. The only difficulty lies in the substitution of Kaṟuppu for Kāttavarāyaṉ at the Māriyammaṉ temple. However, in a context where the horse sacrifice serves as an underlying model, but where the sacrificer is the Goddess and no longer the king, this transformation can be understood as accompanying several others. We shall speak of this again.[142]

iii. Tōṭṭampatti Mākāḷiyammaṉ

In view of the wealth of material collected in Cennimalai and Civaṉmaḷai, it would be important to know whether it is exceptional, or if we can find analogous rituals nearby. Thus Tōṭṭampatti (Periyar Dt., Perundurai Tk.) comes into a survey that was initially unaware of even the name of this minuscule ūr, lost in a flat countryside and without a double temple for Śiva and Subrahmaṇya. I was promised "the mare and the buffalo . . ." In fact, the Mākāḷiyammaṉ temple in Tōṭṭampatti brings together eighteen surrounding ūrs once every two years to celebrate the goddess for sixteen days. The Kavuṇḍars are the dominants and the kottukkārar is one of them. The temple, on the ūr's northern boundary, opens to the north, and the goddess is a form of Kālī. But it is indeed a question of a boundary temple (that of the ūr, but what geographical significance does that have for the totality of villages united for the festival?). Moreover, the paṇḍāram pūcāri states that there is no local sanctuary for Māriyammaṉ, which at the outset somewhat blurs the play of complementarities. A few disruptions in the center-boundary dialectic are thus to be expected, an expectation that will not be disappointed.

The building is modest. The sanctuary consists of a garbhagṛha in which a four-armed Mahākālī stands, provided with the customary weapons and flanked by a small Gaṇeśa, and a maṇḍapa where the door to the garbhagṛha is guarded on each side by a Kaṟuppaṉacāmi. A large veranda prolongs the maṇḍapa and a temporary canopy, still half-covered with palmyra leaves, covers the free space up to a Muṉiyappaṉ, who is situated to face the sanctuary's door. Behind him, vēls are installed, as well as a swing (a quite standard feature), and these are more or less sheltered under a margosa which, itself as well, is planted on the sanctuary's axis (plates 81-82). To the right of the sanctuary stands a small shapeless stone post intended for the tying of sacrificial goats. To the left, a small square platform bears an aniconic stone whose familiar name is unexpected here: Perumāḷ, that is, Viṣṇu himself, whom everyone knows to be the Goddess's brother. The "classical" note is thus given at the outset. This ensemble is surrounded by a vast square enclosure along which, on the western side, are placed

[142]There would no doubt be other more subtle correspondences to establish between these rituals and the classical aśvamedha, for example in examining the respective roles of the musicians. We could not, on the other hand, simply identify all the Muṉiyappars or Munīśvaras in the Tamil countryside with Jamadagni. Yet he is probably the most articulated model for them, the one whose identity nearly becomes conscious. In particular, he matches quite well the munis associated with Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ.

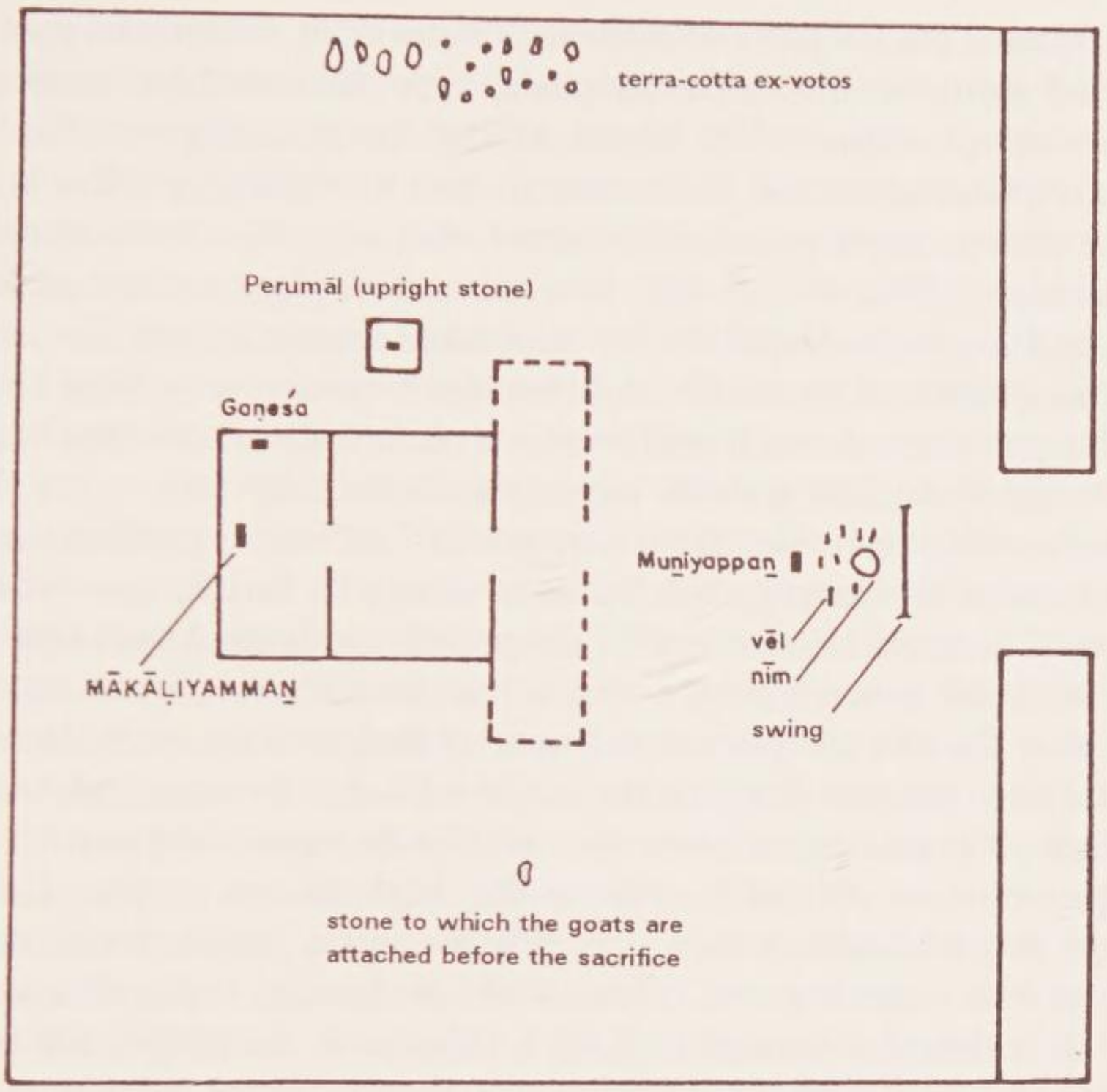

Fig. 7. Tōṭṭampatti, temple of Mākāḷiyamman̲

multiple terra-cotta ex-votos: animal and human forms, as well as half-animal and half-human ones (fig. 7).

• *Description of the Festival*

The festival is always held in Mārkaḻi, but the precise date is decided at an assembly of the eighteen ūrs. It is thought of as a festival lasting sixteen days, but one can actually count seventeen. On the evening of the first day, the paṇḍāram, kottukkārar, and another "priest" (a pūcāri, says the informant) from the Kavuṇḍar caste—in fact, the possessed man or cāmiyāḍi—remove, with a few villagers' help, the vēls installed in front of the temple, all except one that is too tall and whose top is lost in the foliage of the margosa. The dignitaries take with them a torch of twisted cotton—*cēṛupandam*[143]—that is left throughout the year in the maṇḍapa (plate 83). The group goes to the neighboring well

[143]I do not dare to affirm that the orthography of *cēṛu-pandam*, literally "torch of the festival," is the correct one. *Cēṛu* means also "mud, mire." But *ceṛu* with a short *e* can mean "anger." . . . I am, however, always inclined to believe that the simplest hypothesis is also the most plausible. This "torch of the festival" resembles the *pot* of the Pot-raj (plate 14), and more so that of the Mahār devotees of Ellamma, who also gather together with their *pot* around the śamī for Vijayādaśamī (plate 15). See above, pp. 29-30.

to clean the vēls and place a poṭṭu on them and on the torch. The pūcāri performs a pūjā to the vēls and lights the torch. The Kavuṇḍar cāmiyāḍi bears the burning torch and dances in a state of trance while accompanying the procession of the vēls to the Vighneśvara (= Gaṇeśa) temple. Following an ārati to Vighneśvara that is intended to ensure the auspicious development of the ritual, they all return to the temple and do a pradakṣiṇā around it. The vēls are then returned to their place and the pūcāri performs an abhiṣeka and a pūjā to Mahākālī. He then takes the torch from the cāmiyāḍi and guards it in the interior of the temple. A Maṇṇuḍayār potter comes from Cennimalai to bring two clay pots, one of which will become a pūcaṭṭi, the other a kumbha. From the second to the eighth day, the goddess receives a simple daily pūjā.

On the eighth day, a gurukkaḷ from Cennimalai[144] arrives to perform the customary purificatory ritual of the temple, with the installation of a kalaśa, an oblation fire, and the recitation of formulas. Concurrently, the pūcāri, cāmiyāḍi, kottukkārar, and some villagers for a second time remove the vēls, all but the one, and go with the torch to the well to recleanse the vēls and place new poṭṭus on them and the torch. In addition, the pūcāri returns from the well bringing the kumbha filled with water and decorated with margosa foliage. The procession—with the cāmiyāḍi in trance and his torch lit—returns to the temple after an obligatory stop at the Vighneśvara temple. Following the pradakṣiṇā of the Mahākālī temple, the vēls are again installed and the gurukkaḷ sprinkles them with water from the kalaśa, while the kumbha is placed near and before the goddess. It is then that the gurukkaḷ ties a kaṅkaṇa on the pūcāri, and the pūcāri in turn puts kaṅkaṇas on the goddess, Gaṇeśa, the two Karuppus, Muniyappan, and the kumbha. The goddess additionally receives a poṭṭu and a tāli. The entire eighth-day ritual constitutes the goddess's tirukalyāṇam, her "marriage." Come evening the Paṟaiyars play drums, and from twenty to thirty men dance; this continues throughout the night. On the morning of the ninth day, the pūcāri cuts in two the pot intended to form the pūcaṭṭi and puts the inverted lower part into the upper part. Into this he puts some wooden sticks and camphor and lights them. Next he proceeds to the well to carry out his ablutions, returns to offer pūjā to Mahākālī, and then takes the pūcaṭṭi fully into his arms with neem leaves as insulation. For roughly one hour he dances with this pot of fire, going around the temple. Having done so, he places the pūcaṭṭi in the garbhagṛha behind the goddess and to her right. That evening the Paṟaiyars once again animate the nocturnal dancing with the beating of their drums. The same rhythm is observed for eight days: in the early morning the pūcāri dances with the pūcaṭṭi, in the evening the villagers dance to the sound of the Paṟaiyars' drums. The goddess's kumbha remains immobile in front of her effigy.

On the evening of the sixteenth day—the entire ritual to follow occurs at night—the pūcāri, kottukkārar, the Paṟaiyars, a Vaṇṇāṉ (washerman) who bears a lamp different from that of the paṇḍāram at the beginning, and a barber provided with a kerosene lamp (the barber here is a sort of factotum) go to the home of a Kavuṇḍar in Tōppupāḷaiyam (one of the eighteen ūrs). All those who have made vows to offer poṅgal have gathered there with their pots for cooking rice, which they have decorated with flowers and a

[144]Note the dependence on Cennimalai not only for the gurukkal but for the potter.

poṭṭu. The paṇḍāram offers pūjā to all the pots and everyone leaves together for the temple, where the women set about preparing the poṅgal. During this time, the same actors as before once again remove the vēls (for the third time) and proceed to the well with the torch. Although the entire procedure would be the same—ablutions, pūjā to the vēls, lighting of the torch, and return procession with a halt at the Vighneśvara temple—two new actors enter the scene at the well. The kottukkārar has had a mare brought there, which also receives ablutions as well as a garland and a poṭṭu; it will accompany the return procession. And the muppattukkārar (see above, p. 159), another Kavuṇḍar who specializes in this function, now takes the responsibility of holding the mare's bridle and at the same time bringing a pot of water back to the temple. The vēls are again put back in place while the mare does a pradakṣiṇā of the sanctuary. The paṇḍāram offers an ārati to the goddess and the muppattukkārar then sprinkles the mare's four legs with water from the jar that he has brought from the well. It is once again a moment of silence and waiting until the mare deigns to shake herself. Here, however, no oracular purpose appears to be connected with the animal's "assent," which is only needed to move on in the ritual sequence. A new procession is then formed: the mare led by the muppattukkārar, the pūcāri with a basket containing the ingredients for an abhiṣeka and a pūjā, the vēls, once again removed, and the musicians, all of whom make their way northward about five hundred meters from the temple to a place where an aniconic stone called Ammaicāmi is located. The pūcāri "calls the goddess," according to the expression now known, and performs an abhiṣeka and a pūjā to Ammaicāmi. After this a ram, offered by the kottukkārar to Ammaicāmi, is decapitated by a Nāḍar executioner. The victim's head and body go to the Paṟaiyars.

For their part, the women (most of whom are probably Kavuṇḍars), once they have cooked their poṅgal, return to the same Kavuṇḍar house in Tōppupāḷaiyam, where they prepare flour lamps. They return in procession to the temple with their unlit māviḷakkus and place them before the goddess on a white cloth provided by the Vaṇṇāṉ. During this time, the men have returned with the vēls, which they again put in place, while the mare has been left with her syce beside Ammaicāmi, where her role has ended. The pūcāri removes a small quantity of rice from all the poṅgals and then performs pūjā to the goddess, Muṉiyappaṉ, the vēls, and the poṅgals. Then he offers the goddess the poṅgal that he had earlier removed from each pot. The women light their māviḷakkus, and a ram, offered by the kottukkārar, is sacrificed in front of Muṉiyappaṉ by the same Nāḍar. The victim's blood is poured over Muṉiyappaṉ, and its head and body are given to the pūcāri. Following this, an indeterminate number of votive goats, rams, and cocks are immolated by the same executioner in front of Muṉiyappaṉ (in some years, as many as five hundred victims have been counted). Those who have made offerings leave the temple as soon as their animal has been sacrificed to take it home along with their poṅgal.

When all the votive sacrifices have been made, another pair of new characters enters the scene: an assistant paṇḍāram, who has received no kaṅkaṇa, and a buffalo, purchased with the money of the collectivity. The buffalo and the new pūcāri are taken to the well for the required ablutions and the animal receives a poṭṭu. Still wearing the wet garments in which he bathed, this pūcāri comes to the temple with the musicians. He enters the interior of the sanctuary, while the musicians also rejoin the group at the well

that includes the kottukkārar, cāmiyāḍi, and main pūcāri. This time it is the cāmiyāḍi who takes the buffalo's rope to lead it in procession to the goddess's temple, stopping to offer pūjā at the Vighneśvara temple. The buffalo is led inside the enclosure to circumambulate the shrine, after which it is taken outside. A hole has been dug facing the door on the axis of the sanctum. The Paṟaiyars summon the assistant pūcāri with their drums, and the latter comes out of the sanctuary in a trance holding a katti in his hand. It is he who will sever the buffalo's head to the frantic beating of the drums. The victim's head and body are pushed into the hole, which is immediately filled with earth and stones. The pūcāri executioner and the cāmiyāḍi fall to the ground just after the immolation, "having become dizzy." A pot of water is poured on them and they are brought into the garbhagṛha. The regular pūcāri offers pūjā to Mahākālī, sprinkles the two men with the tīrtha from the pūjā, and applies vibhūti on them. They then stand up and return to their houses. The pūcāri removes the kaṅkaṇas from all the deities and from himself (removing, as well, the goddess's tāli to preserve it, since it is gold); then, taking the kumbha decorated with neem, and accompanied by the drummers, he carries everything to the well and throws it all into it. He bathes and returns to the temple in his wet clothing, where the kottukkārar gives him a new garment; the second paṇḍāram and the muppattukkārar each receive one also. The barber, washerman, and the Paṟaiyars receive only prasāda from the pūcāri. After this night replete with activity, we have already come to the seventeenth day. A screen is placed before the goddess and a cock is sacrificed in front of her sanctuary for the two Kaṟuppus. A meal is offered to them as well as to Muṉiyappaṉ—and eaten on site by the pūcāri.

• *Analysis*

It was better not to begin with this Tōṭṭampatti ritual. It has, in effect, the remarkable quality of broadly combining the structure of the Māriyammaṉ festival such as it was observed in Cennimalai (but also in Kannapuram, Beck 1981, 87-91), where it was distinct from the Kālī festival, with the elements—pūcaṭṭi, mare, and buffalo—of the festivals of Māriyammaṉ and Kālī as goddesses of the center and boundary. But an important element would seem to be missing, the famous kambam, the post erected during the ritual so as to marry it to Māriyammaṉ, which is replicated by a temporary ritual post and a sort of permanent stele, Kaṟuppu or Tūṇaicāmi (see also below). Its absence seems to entail a shift of the blood sacrifice to the sixteenth day of the festival. On the other hand, the dissociation of the pūcaṭṭi and the post thus finds itself confirmed. Furthermore, two elements appear that are ritually linked: the vēls[145] and the burning torch carried by the possessed Kavuṇḍar. In addition, it is clear in the minds of the local informants (notably the pūcāri) that the goddess is married in a temporary fashion during the festival and that she is unmarried the rest of the time. She normally bears neither poṭṭu nor tāli. But it is much more difficult to know who the husband of the goddess is at the time of the ritual. No one dared to formulate an hypothesis.

[145]Vēls are to be found everywhere in this region, and the Mahākālī temple in Cennimalai includes a certain number of them behind Muṉiyappaṉ (as is also the case here). It is their ritual function that seems to be new.

But let us first reestablish the absent factor. Knowing the particular form of the vēls (plate 82) and the sanctuary-facing position that they have in this region, one can only compare them to Pōtu Rāju and his cousins, and not directly to the forked post that rather more evokes a triśūla. The vēl is both a weapon, an instrument of torture, and a sacrificial post, another torture instrument.[146] It could therefore be the ambulatory form of the post required by this ritual, even though its mobility would be utilized in a new way. But its association with the torch, which for its part is coiled (plate 83), lends it an additional interest, for in this combination the two essential elements in the symbolism of Pōtu Rāju—the post and the fire—are found to be juxtaposed. If one evokes the bearers of the same coiled torch in Mahārāṣṭra, perhaps one can add a gender opposition between the male post and the deliberately coiled torch carried by the possessed Kavuṇḍar.[147] In this case, there would be a veritable vēl-torch pair in which the torch would probably be a figure of the goddess. Yet all this, after all, remains unconscious, and one must not push the symbolism too far in this direction. But the comings and goings of the vēls from the temple courtyard to the well where they are bathed, and the pūjās and poṭṭus they receive each time, are noteworthy. One pauses especially over the tirukalyāṇam: while the vēls have not received the protective kaṅkaṇa (at least this was never mentioned during the inquiry), they are nevertheless sprinkled with water from the kalaśa by the gurukkaḷ himself, and they alone receive this aspersion outside the sanctuary. Probably the kumbha had a right to the same honor, and not the mūlavar of Mahākālī, to whom the gurukkaḷ would not offer worship directly (here, there is no processional statue). This "marriage" rite took place on the eighth day, the very day on which Māriyamman is "married" to the post in both Cennimalai and Kannapuram. One can even go so far as to question the explanation given by informants according to which one vēl cannot be pulled up like the others because of its height: would it not be necessary to reverse this formulation and say that it was only made so high to better immobilize it? It thus finds itself in a permanent association, "married," with the neem, the goddess's tree. In other words, one would have here as elsewhere one or more mobile ritual posts[148] and one permanent post. The only difference lies in the fact that the mobile posts are not renewed for each festival. For this renewal, multiple ablutions are substituted in which the posts are put in the well, notably prior to the "marriage," and at the time of the procession in which the mare is taken to the temple. This ensures at the same time the indispensable presence of water in the ritual, a presence reinforced by the wet clothing worn by the executioner at the buffalo sacrifice, as well as by the pūcāri before he receives a new garment as his dakṣiṇā at the conclusion.

[146]See above, pp. 139 ff., where the vēl or śūla is a double for the kaḷumaram upon which one enacts the impalement of Kāttavarāyan.

[147]There is also a passage from the torch to the whip, which takes place by way of the form and the torture they both evoke. Both of them doubtlessly go back to the grass cord that binds the Vedic sacrificial animal and attaches it to the yūpa. We saw above the whip carried on the shoulder of the pandāram who attends to the goddess's kumbha (p. 182).

[148]The number of vēls varies and seems to have no importance. Votive vēls were probably added to a single ritually necessary vēl, as with so many offerings to the goddess. Did we not observe small posts around Tūṇaicāmi in Civaṉmalai?

In itself, the pūcaṭṭi rite contains nothing that would allow one to either confirm or invalidate its interpretation: it could be Jamadagni submitting his wife to torture. The only confirmation we would have of this is the place where the pūcaṭṭi is put in the sanctum: in the husband's position. But the alternation during the eight days of nocturnal dancing by the men (mostly Kavuṇḍars) to the sound of the Paṟaiyars' drums, and the the pūcāri's dance with the pūcaṭṭi in the early morning could indeed have a meaning analogous to the alternation of the kumbha and pūcaṭṭi on the forked post. The Paṟaiyars are linked with the vēls and the torch and accompany them whenever they go. They are also associated with the buffalo and with its executioner. The nocturnal dance—whose "terrible" character has already been suggested—would therefore be the image of the Earth coming to grips with the asuric prince (symbolized notably by the vēls), whereas the pūcāri's dance would, on the contrary, be the Earth grappling with her Brahman and warrior husband: two aspects of the same drama. Briefly, in this first act of the ritual, only the goddess appears in the position of symbolic victim, including at the time of her "marriage"; or rather, it is her marriage that launches the alternation of the dances.

At this point, the part of the festival that elsewhere would be devoted to Māriyamman ends, but it is deprived of its conclusion. What occur as spatially and chronologically complementary rituals at the neighboring places carry on here in a single complex liturgical configuration. However, when the preparation of the poṅgal begins and when the mare arrives, one has the distinct feeling of entering into a different setting that does not suffice to characterize the blood sacrifices. I will not return here to the interpretation of the mare and "calling of the goddess" sequence as the transformation of a phase of the aśvamedha. The complementary "pressing of the soma" that we thought to discern in the crushing of the ram's head in the hole for the post disappears here, as do all the features of complementarity between the two rituals and the two goddesses. On the contrary, the aspersion and the "assent" of the mare, while they inaugurate the process of animal sacrifices that culminate in that of the buffalo, appear to be redundancies of the symbolic sacrifice of the goddess. Muṉiyappaṉ is indeed the goddess's deceased husband to whom blood libations are offered. But he is certainly not recognized as such. Upon reflection, the widowed goddess resembles the unmarried goddess by the absence of her tāli and poṭṭu: the interpretation thus remains open. But the juxtaposition of the two rituals retains a certain logic. Muṉiyappaṉ disappeared at Civaṉmalai when the two goddesses had their parallel celebrations, since the fate to which Jamadagni submitted his wife and his own death were "forgotten." Here, the goddess's torture reappears in the pūcaṭṭi rite, and Jamadagni is tacitly put to death between the two phases of the ritual, since Muṉiyappaṉ receives his tarpaṇa of blood on the sixteenth day.

Nevertheless, there are traces of a break in continuity in the linking of the rituals, as is evident above all in the doubling of certain roles. The kottukkārar—who continues to preside over the festival as a whole—is replaced next to the mare by a new actor from the same caste, the muppattukkārar, whose role is as ephemeral as the mare's and ends before Ammaicāmi, this concretization of the simple names murmured in the aśvamedha. Likewise, the ordinary paṇḍāram who is the main pūcāri of the entire festival takes on another pūcāri to fulfil his job with the buffalo, as if he could not be both the dancer with the pot of fire as well as the executioner for the goddess, since both pūcāris embody the goddess in trance. Thus both the "sacrificing" function and the "officiating"

function require two incumbents, the two doubles being present as emanations of the first two on a somewhat inferior level. The muppattukkārar leads the mare, but it is the kottukkārar who has him do so. And the pūcāri who executes the buffalo receives no kaṅkaṇa, which excludes him from any other ritual function within the frame of the festival. Recalling that Kālī is after all only an emanation of the Goddess destined to accomplish an inferior task, there is something in this relationship between the two forms of the Goddess that recurs on the level of the actors. We have, in effect, two different rituals that are connected, one from which all animal sacrifice is excluded and in which the goddess is the victim,[149] and one from which the goddess, a victim at first insofar as she is the Earth, emerges victorious. The outcome is that in the "Māriyamman̲" phase of the ritual, the marriage is in a certain manner double. One thus revisits the goddess's struggle between two husbands who incarnate cosmic disorder, and leave her in the second phase doubly a widow, or more simply unmarried—like the Goddess in her warrior function. Perhaps it is not entirely by chance that the sanctuary includes a representation of Viṣṇu-Perumāḷ.

The final note given by the loss of consciousness of the executioner and the Kavuṇḍar cāmiyāḍi (whose "femininity" is therewith affirmed)—a theme already present at Civan̲-malai for the paṇḍāram at the buffalo's immolation—is again a classical legacy. If the paṇḍāram represents the goddess, above all when he is in trance, this signifies that the putting to death of the buffalo, the abusive pretender to the world's sovereignty, or the asuric king (they are both the same), does not take place without a temporary death of the Earth who loses her sovereign. The entire epic war witnesses to this absence of triumphalism and to a veritable ordeal that is for the Earth the loss of her princes, albeit that they were condemned for their breach of dharma. Perhaps we can see in this point once again how the shift could operate in the "popular" ritual from the victorious king to the sovereign Goddess, from the royal and triumphant horse sacrifice to that of the asuric buffalo, and the ultimate transformation of the same demon into a devotee of the Goddess. The Earth is always the main stake, and between the Earth and the warrior Goddess there is much more than one link, even if we should not always wish to speak of it in terms of an identity. In serving the cause of the gods, the Goddess serves the Earth, who must be at the center of a perfectly ordered cosmos in which demons, like gods, have their place. In "normal" times, it is precisely the king who must ensure the permanence of order, and it is no accident that every Hindu king places his lineage under the Goddess's protection, whatever be her name. At the village level, it is as if the king and his protective goddess are identified, with the royal ritual and the Goddess's warrior function symbolically reflecting each other.

iv. Cennimalai, Civanmalai, and Tōṭṭampatti Compared

The question now is whether we can push the analysis of this ritual ensemble found at Cen̲n̲imalai, Civan̲malai, and Tōṭṭampatti a little further by focusing on the single rite of the māviḷakkus, the flour lamps that women bring at given moments of the festival.

[149]Renukā is decapitated and brought back to life before being subjected to the ordeal of war. The first torture announces the second.

Here at least, flour lamp offerings seem to be the exclusive prerogative of women,[150] and their place is completely different from what has been observed in Āndhra. It is, however, on the basis of data from Āndhra that it was possible to put forward an hypothesis on the flour lamps' significance (and relatedly, that of the foreleg put crosswise in the mouth of the animal's severed head).[151] Their different place in the ritual does not necessarily imply a change in meaning, but could, on the contrary, help us to look into the ritual more deeply.

- *Māvilakkus Again*

The flour lamp is, in effect, along with the grass bond and its multiple transformations, one of the liturgical elements that anchor blood sacrifices offered to the goddess in the Vedic tradition. In its form of the flour lamp, this element is totally unrecognizable and, at least in its form, cut off from its primary meaning. But Āndhra and the practices still attested at Ṣoḷāpur in Mahārāṣṭra furnish additional landmarks that must not be lost from view. It will be recalled that in the buffalo sacrifice to the goddess in an Āndhra village,[152] when the head of the victim is presented to the deity, a small lamp is put on its cranium. Today the flour lamp represents the most traditional, the most "ancient," form, and it is generally replaced by a clay cup. But there are still testimonies to a situation where the lamp is fueled with the victim's fat (Elmore 1925, 17), and even where the lamp is made by mixing the animal's entrails into the dough (Ṣoḷāpur). In addition, it is associated with the fat of the abdomen that is used to cover the victim's eyes and part of its head. It is this combination, fat-entrails-fire, that gives the lamp its significance, one that it retains when there is no longer a flour lamp. The cult of the local goddess that culminates in the buffalo sacrifice is, it appears, the logical if not the historical outcome, for it would be very difficult to reconstruct the history of the divorce that takes place in bhakti Hinduism between the pure, bloodless cult of the superior gods, and the impure cults, requiring animal sacrifices, offered first to the Goddess and secondarily to the "demons" who are subordinate to her.[153] Insofar as the buffalo sacrifice is the sacrifice to the Goddess par excellence (notably as found on the royal level), it is not surprising to discover something of the horse sacrifice in its liturgical unfolding. From this point of view, the incursion into Kongunad confirms the interpretation proposed for Āndhra by seeking the roots of the Goddess's cult in the Vedic sacrifice. The lamp placed on the victim's head thus prolongs in the buffalo sacrifice the presence of the Vedic oblation fire—into which one offered, beyond clarified butter, the omentum and the fat of the animal victim, as well as blood in the case of the horse sacrifice. The flour lamp is the ultimate—or the penultimate when it is replaced

[150]This does not seem to be the case in Kannapuram. Cf. Beck 1981, 90. The Māriyamman temple she studied also seems to have known buffalo sacrifices, which are here reserved for boundary goddesses.

[151]Above, p. 89. Cf. p. 17, and further mention on pp. 134, 141.

[152]I observed the same rite in the sacrifice of buffalo at the royal Durgāpūjā in Jaipur; the lamps were of terra-cotta.

[153]It is probably impossible to demonstrate that the subordination of demons to pure gods such as Aiyanār or Khandobā always proceeds by way of the Goddess, but I would still stress a logical schema here that is fundamental to the Hindu pantheon as a whole. I will return to this problem below, without, however, wishing to reach any conclusion on its theoretical aspect, which remains an open question.

by a clay cup—transformation of this oblation fire. The fire and the victim are intimately associated in it, as they are in Pōtu Rāju, if one recalls that the dough of which the lamp is fashioned is obtained directly from grains crushed with water in a mortar—which is already a form of putting to death in which women are the only executioners.

In Kongunad, at least in the rituals that have concerned us in this inquiry, if one keeps this connective thread, the māviḷakkus would provide an interesting punctuation of the festival. They are absent from the Pirāttiyamman ritual in Cennimalai—which confirms the particular situation of that goddess of a caste—whereas they are present in all the other main festivals to goddesses at the center and at the boundary in Cennimalai, Civanmalai, and Tōṭṭampatti. At the Mahākālī temple in Cennimalai, women from pure castes (Brahmans and Ceṭṭiyārs) come to offer flour lamps on the eighth day, this day particularly reserved for vegetarian castes (see above, p. 162) and immediately preceding the poṅgal and blood sacrifices in front of Muniyappan on the ninth day. Here, moreover, the lamps are combined with other offerings, coconuts, bananas, and fresh coconut milk and oil as the liquids for the abhiṣeka. Probably these votive abhiṣekas are no less sacrificial offerings—the clarified butter into the fire—than the coconut and flour lamp. These two latter elements are, in any case, clearer in this regard. The symbolism of the coconut is recognized by everyone: when the pūcāri breaks it in two, it is equivalent to a human sacrifice in which the two parts form at times the head and the body, at other times the husband and wife. It is altogether normal for the flour lamps to be the fire that accompanies all these offerings, but they are perhaps also something more. What we wish to suggest is that there would be no flour lamps were there not a blood sacrifice on the horizon. The lamp is not simply the fire's substitute or transformation. It is inserted in a context where fire has its place: every great Vedic sacrifice includes a *paśubandha,* animal victims. In other words, it does not suffice to note that the eighth day is reserved for vegetarian castes; it must be added that it prepares for the blood sacrifices of the ninth day, when Muniyappan will be covered with blood throughout the day, and when the goddess will be "married" in the course of a blood sacrifice performed before the same Muniyappan and a poṭṭu of blood will be put on her kumbha and the man she possesses. After the foregoing, the tenth day appears to be somewhat artificial with its checking of accounts. No doubt what is important is the cock sacrificed that evening to Karuppu.

• *Aśvamedha Schema*

We are thus led, on the basis of "secondary" elements, to a reading of this festival in which a simplified schema of the aśvamedha reappears[154] in the form of the three central days of soma pressing and animal sacrifices. If one posits the eighth day as the first day of the sacrifice proper, the flour lamps could symbolize the pressed soma as well as the fire. As to the tirukalyāṇam on the following evening at the end of a day in which blood has flowed abundantly over Muniyappan, it evokes the ritual movements of the mahiṣī in the aśvamedha, that is, her "copulation" with the dead horse at the end

[154]We have here again the feeling that a correct interpretation of the epic war would clarify this ritual: it is on the eighth day of the battle (MBh 6.90 [83]) that Irāvat, the Nāga son of Arjuna, dies.

of the second day of soma pressing, when the immolation of the horse is only the acme of a series of animal sacrifices arranged around twenty-one yūpas. Once Muṉiyappaṉ has been identified with Jamadagni, the "devouring Fire," his bloodbath is then a direct allusion to the offering of the horse's blood into the Vedic fire, and the "marriage" must take place after the putting to death of the main victim, the one that is offered to the goddess, in this case a goat. This tirukalyāṇam corresponds to the moment in the horse sacrifice that will become the "calling of the goddesses" in Civaṉmalai and Tōṭṭampatti. Moreover, the strong feminine connotation of the māviḷakkus is not without a link to the appearance of a mare in the ritual at Civaṉmalai and at Tōṭṭampatti. The male puruṣa/paśu register is replaced by one in which the goddess is both offered as symbolic victim and, finally, is victorious. The same goes for the women who cook the poṅgal on the ninth day to feed the goddess and their households.

It will be remembered that at Ceṉṉimalai the Māriyammaṉ festival is clearly separated in time from the Kālī festival and presents no isomorphism with it, contrary to what takes place in Civaṉmalai. Now the māviḷakkus appear twice at Ceṉṉimalai, always in the hands of women. On the evening of the seventh day, the kambam is erected facing the sanctuary and the goddess becomes its wife. On the night of the ninth to tenth day, when the pūcāri lights the pūcaṭṭi for the first time and proceeds to place it on top of the kambam, the women bring flour lamps, which they arrange before the goddess. Three hours later, it is they who will pour water over the priest and the post during the dance of the pūcaṭṭi, and they will repeat this every morning until the fifteenth day. But they have only brought the flour lamps for the beginning of this phase of the ritual. For someone who has seen the severed heads of buffalo and goats aligned in a goddess temple maṇḍapa with lighted lamps on their tops, such a display of lamps in front of the sanctuary cannot but evoke the heads that are virtually beneath them. These are without doubt devotional offerings by the women, but more than that, this is a nonvotive codified rite that all the women of the villages—excluding Paṟaiyars—must perform. Then, parallel to the ceremonies at the temple, Māriyammaṉ's utsavamūrti goes out in procession over the rathavīthi for three days: the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days of the festival. Now it is only on the fourteenth day that the same women accompany the goddess, each carrying a lit māviḷakku. It is apparently within the temple that the important activities take place, with the dramatic alternation of the firepot and the kumbha filled with water, and the ecstatic dance of the pūcāri embracing the pūcaṭṭi; and this alternation does not vary from the tenth to the fifteenth day. However, the three days of the goddess's procession outside have their own rhythm and are not simple ceremonial redundancies, since it is only on the fourteenth day that the women take part there with their lamps.

We are thus inclined to follow the same connective thread and to see in these three days the echo of an aśvamedha, with the second day the one for offering blood sacrifices, as marked here by the women's lamps. Going back over the course of the festival, one perceives that the first offering of lamps inaugurates the period in which it is as if the goddess, in the person of her possessed pūcāri, is tortured by her Brahman husband in the rite of the pūcaṭṭi, at least in the interpretation we propose for it. The collective māviḷakkus—which are deliberately kept distinct from the votive offerings—thus mark two of the festival's sacrificial high points: one in the symbolic

form of a ritual torture within the temple, the other only indicated by the māviḷakkus on the occasion of the goddess's triumphal processions. The latter is the figure of the sacrificer in the aśvamedha, the king, and the second day of procession corresponds to the putting to death of the horse. One thus finds the two aspects of this goddess who is both slain and victorious,[155] and in addition a single sacrificial schema that lends meaning to the whole while echoing the myth of Reṇukā. The suffering goddess belongs to the period of the inaugural dīkṣā required for the sacrifice proper. The horse sacrifice is preceded by *twelve* days of dīkṣā and *twelve* days of *upasads* (praises of the deities), during which the construction of the fire altar—*agnicayana*—and the *pravargya* (preparation of a mixture of warm milk and butter) take place at the same time.[156] If one omits the six days of preparation for the dīkṣā (which raises to thirty the preparatory days for the three days of the soma pressing and the blood sacrifices), the module of *twelve* stands out, and one can consider that it is no longer by chance that the three days for the procession of the utsavamūrti, corresponding to the celebration of the royal sacrifice strictly speaking, unfold from the thirteenth to the fifteenth days. This could be a condensation of the dīkṣā and the upasads into the initial twelve days. In any case, the twelve days of the goddess festival are divided exactly into two parts, since it is on the seventh day that the kambam is erected and the goddess's "marriage" to it takes place. It is perhaps this rite that marks the goddess's entry into the dīkṣā period, although the painful aspect of this consecration would only be perceptible from the morning of the tenth day. But her marriage to the kambam—evoking perhaps Reṇukā's temptation on seeing the frolics of the prince and his wife—is no doubt sensed as a painful episode, insofar as everything is done to indicate the low status of the post.

We shall conclude the examination of the rite of the lamps here, since the rituals in Civaṉmalai and Tōṭṭampatti reveal much more clearly the sacrificial structure and the rapport with the aśvamedha. One could only verify the appearance of the māviḷakkus at the moment one would expect them: under the lamps, it is always an easy matter to replace the severed head of the Goddess, and eventually those of the women who bring them as offerings. It has sufficed to cast light on the strong coherence of a complex ritual ensemble, one in which the abundance of local variants could well overshadow the deep-lying constants that give goddess cults their richness of meaning.

b. The Dhārāpuram Region

It is now possible to offer a briefer treatment of the Dhārāpuram region, since we will find there subjects already known that will not significantly modify the interpretation of the whole. But the focal point remains the post erected in front of the Goddess's sanctuary. From this point of view, the goddesses at the center and at the boundary in

[155]Let us note that she already has these two well-delineated aspects in the *Harivaṃśa*, while they are symbolically alluded to in the Mbh in the roles of princesses. Of course underlying all this can be traced—mutatis mutandis, and there are many *mutanda*—the model of the original Puruṣa sacrifice and Sovereign sacrificer.

[156]Cf. Dumont 1927, 54 ff. Let us admit that in more than one feature, the asvamedha such as it is codified in the texts bears more the mark of a theoretical elaboration than a concern for an effective ritual practice. Once again, it is possible that the more symbolic than real existence of the horse sacrifice would have aided its reutilization in different, but semantically related, rituals.

Cennimalai and Civanmalai reveal an interesting complementarity, since there the buffalo sacrifice is performed where there is no post, and because the post of Māriyamman, if it is related to the sacrifice, does not immediately reveal the presence of the buffalo.[157] But to the extent that in one way or another we could resort to the underlying schema of the aśvamedha whether we were at the boundary or the center, one must imagine that the complementarity is closer than would appear. If we have separated the Dhārāpuram region from our discussion of the preceding rites, it is essentially because of the replication of the post at the center and at the boundary. In Dhārāpuram itself, a small town but large enough for the interrelationship of its temples to elude any rapid investigation, the (apparently only) Māriyamman temple is fronted by a permanent post, as would be expected, whereas the peripheral Kālī shrines (there seem to be four) are provided with a different form of post, this time functional and connected with the buffalo sacrifice. In fact, only two have this particularity: the temples on the northern and eastern boundaries. The northern temple is said to have formerly been the site of buffalo sacrifices, but these have long ceased. Correlatively, the large jyotistambha bearing the pot of fire at the Kārttikai festival, which one saw farther north in front of the double Śiva-Subrahmaṇya temples, practically disappears here (see above, p. 155 n. 82). I discovered one in very bad condition outside the Kālī temple in Kaḍattūr (below). In any case, it remains foreign to the rituals that concern us here, and only its particular form justifies its being mentioned. It would ensure the permanence of the form in the classical register that would disappear on the popular level, while also showing that the initial theme of the post-god was indeed present. Thanks to a new sacrificial apparatus, it is precisely this form that reappears here in the cult of the goddess, undergoing a hitherto unheralded transformation.

i. Dhārāpuram Temples and the Mythic Sites of the MBh *Virāṭaparvan*

Of the four boundary temples that seem to belong to Dhārāpuram—excluding the Cinna Kālī temple, a ward temple—only three were visited, and a study of the ritual could only be undertaken at the temple on the southern boundary, that of Periyakāḷiyamman, also called Ellaikāḷiyamman, where the elements of the Kālī festival farther north, at Tillāpuri, were collected at the same time. The latter temple is almost always closed, although regular worship takes place there. Its distance from the locality and from any settlement perhaps explains its semi-abandonment, but it is also said that the private administrator of the temple broke off the practice of buffalo sacrifice out of personal conviction. The town is built on the reputed site of the capital of King Virāṭa, and is thus named Virāṭapuram (the Upaplavya of the epic). Virāṭa is the Matsya king who received at his court, unbeknownst to him, the five Paṇḍavas and their wife during the year in which they had to remain absolutely incognito. Book 4 of the MBh has already surfaced as a mythical background at Civanmalai (above, p. 174), but it becomes a constant reference at Dhārāpuram and the surrounding area, although one cannot say when this association begins. Precision is no greater at the Periyakāḷiyamman temple. Probably the goddess is the guardian here of the southern boundary of Virāṭa's capital.

[157]However, let us not forget that Karuppu has not spoken his last word. See below, pp. 247 ff.

At Tillāpuri, the recollection is more precise, since on the chevet of the goddess's temple, in a scene appearing on the eastern face of the sanctuary's pyramidal tower (plate 84), one can point out the (vacant) location of the śamī tree where Arjuna is said to have concealed his weapons and those of his brothers before presenting himself to Virāṭa (MBh 4.5). There is a small Kaṟuppu shrine in front of the temple, perpendicular to it and open to the west. Curiously, whereas Kaṟuppu is not associated here with any particular tree (the god's preference for "milk trees" is known), an unknown deity facing him in a symmetrical shrine is associated by name with the tree that shelters him: Iluppaḍiyaṉ. This god, who is turned toward the north like the goddess, whereas his shrine opens to the east, is sheltered by an immense *iluppai-* or *iluppu-maram,* or *mahua* (<Skt. *madhuka*; *Madhuca longifolia* [Koenig]). Is this tree, which has a sweet edible flower, intended to replace an impossible śamī here? The grounds of the temple are marvelously nested into a bend of the Amarāvatī River, and a few hundred meters away on the same bank a cremation ground completes the site. The latter clearly bears no trace of antiquity beneath its sheet-metal roof, no more than does the temple, but its presence is nevertheless an implicit reference to the same episode in the MBh. One will see other examples in the surrounding area of temples to boundary goddesses being associated with episodes in the *Virāṭaparvan*.[158] Nor can one believe that the highlighting of a site of the śamī (locally called *vaṉṉi,* from the Tamil name) would have nothing to do with the tree rooted in Vedic tradition. Nothing in this regard is consciously expressed, but in Dhārāpuram, as in many other localities of Tamilnadu, the celebration of Vijayādaśamī includes essentially the putting to death of the demon Vaṉṉi (see below).

• *Ellaikāḷiyammaṉ or Periyakāḷiyammaṉ*

The Ellaikāḷiyammaṉ temple is more remarkable for its configuration and its iconography than for its ritual, although it is also of modest proportions and without artistic pretensions. The shrine forms an elongated rectangle in which the sanctum is preceded by an ardhamaṇḍapa and a maṇḍapa. There is no enclosure wall, but at the temple's entrance (oriented to the north) a square aedicule with four pillars to support its roof reposes on a slightly raised socle. The area beneath the roof is empty, but the socle is built to extend forward toward the temple, and into that uncovered portion are set a flagpole, a traditional triśūla, and another triśūla whose middle prong has the form of a vēl while the side-prongs are reduced to wirelike dimensions (plate 85), according to a model prevalent in this region where the vēl, the weapon proper to Subrahmaṇya, is present everywhere. This triśūla is so high that it cannot be accommodated beneath the

[158]The examples enumerated here are far from being exhaustive, and it would in particular be necessary to continue the inquiry into the side of Karṇāṭaka north of Kongunad. We know that Orissa has identified a hill with the same epic śamī in the absence of any śamī tree. Hindu collective consciousness has felt itself authorized to rediscover the Matsya kingdom (which archaeology would like to situate much nearer the epic's geographical center in the north Indian plain) in zones reputed to be inferior for the practice of dharma: frontier lines, as it were, that the Goddess would naturally defend against all external threat. Let us immediately add that a region where Māriyammaṉ is so obviously Reṇukā is, in any case, bathed in an epic ambience, probably relayed by an infinitude of local purānas or māhātmyas in Sanskrit or the vernacular whose traces are for the most part lost forever—as are the ancient states of the MBh. Regarding the link between the śamī and the Goddess in the MBh, see Biardeau 1977, 1981a, 1984.

little sanctuary's roof. At the top of its shaft, just beneath the three prongs, is fixed a small square horizontal platform provided with a small bell at each corner. This slender construction, entirely of metal, recalls in its upper part the impalement stakes with cruciform bases and the posts of Ramnad. At its base, two knives with curved blades, also set in the cement of the pedestal, represent Karuppu. A little farther to the north and still on the sanctuary's axis, two quite low stone posts of rectangular section are installed opposite one another, each pierced by a hole at the top: this is the *kolaikkal,* the "killing stone," the local equivalent of the sacrificial post. When an animal is put to death, a horizontal wooden crossbar is inserted in the holes of the two stone posts. The stone is roughly hewn, such that the rounded tops call nothing in particular to mind. It is upon viewing the carefully prepared replica of the kolaikkal in Kaḍattūr (below), and even more so the one in Kārattoḷuvūr (plate 86), that one notices the groove that separates the body of each stone from its rounded top with the hole. The stonecutter in Kārattoḷuvūr went so far in his refinement as to give the stone crossbar an octagonal section. This curious pivoting from the vertical to the horizontal of an eight-sided form that symbolizes the directions speaks much for the loss of meaning, but nevertheless serves to remove all doubt as to the distant model that has been reworked. Moreover, the fateful but disarticulated form finds its sacrificial function in the most exact sense of the term: the animal's head is placed on the crossbar at the moment it is put to death.

A further observation: the goddess's mūlavar is standing and has eight arms (two of which are broken), and an anthropomorphic Mahiṣāsura is sculpted on its base. It is doubled by another mūlavar—no doubt the "true" one—called *svayambhū-devī,* which is only an aniconic stone planted in the ground. In the left corner of the sanctum is the goddess's utsavamūrti, also standing but with four arms and surmounted by a cobra with opened hood. However, one will see that if her utsavamūrti indeed plays the role expected of her in the festival, another form of the goddess appears, calling to mind other encounters: this is a bronze Kālī, but reduced to her head, thus a severed head.

●● *Description of the Festival*

The goddess has a paṇḍāram priest and her main devotees are Kavuṇḍars (Paḍaiyāṭcis) and Nattamāṉ Uḍaiyārs (another landowner caste). Her festival is held each year during three days of Mārkaḷi (December-January), beginning on a Tuesday. On this first day, the pūcāri goes to the landowner who administers the temple to fetch the bronze head of Kālī that has been deposited with him as a precautionary measure. He puts it down on the bank of the Rājavāykkāl (the "royal" canal), placing it in a kind of "karagam" decorated with flowers.[159] He offers pūjā to Kālī, and the karagam is taken in procession around the village on the head of the priest. Having arrived at the temple, it is placed in front of the mūlavar to spend the night there.

The next morning, the goddess receives an abhiṣeka and a meal of cooked rice. But it is the bronze head that receives the pūjā. Toward nine o'clock, the utsavamūrti is placed in a swing in the maṇḍapa, facing its entrance door, to attend the sacrifice of a

[159]Here the karagam is not the brass pot filled with water and placed under a wickerwork frame decorated with garlands. The term designates only this wickerwork structure and its decoration.

goat offered by eight hundred Paḍaiyāṭci households. The executioner is a Mutturāca (a caste of temple servants and watchmen; Thurston 1909, vol. 1, 25). For the beheading, a hole has been dug between the two uprights of the kolaikkal and, after a pūjā to the utsavamūrti, the animal is placed above the hole, its head stretched over the wooden crossbar in such a manner that it falls into the hole upon having been severed. The victim's body goes to the executioner, while the head is covered with earth. The utsavamūrti receives another pūjā. That same evening, the residents of the locality (that is, probably those from this part of the town) who have made vows come in their turn to offer goats and cocks. The utsavamūrti then goes in procession to the bazaar in the town's center.

On Thursday morning, Kālī's bronze head receives a pūjā, while—an exceptional fact—she has kept her garlands from the first day. That evening, the eight-armed mūlavar is given a solemn abhiṣeka. Meanwhile, the utsavamūrti has since the previous day remained in the swing in the maṇḍapa, evidently awaiting a new animal offering. In fact, the hole between the uprights of the kolaikkal is dug again (it is called *kaṭaikkuḻi*, "boundary hole") and a buffalo, purchased by the collectivity (it is not possible to say more, but this collectivity seems larger than the Paḍaiyāṭcis involved in the first sacrifice, since the latter are not mentioned) is taken and, following a pūjā offered to the hole, is slain according to the same process as the goat. This time the executioner is a Paṟaiyar and his weapon is an arivāḷ. When the head has fallen into the hole, it is covered with earth. There follows a dīpārādhanā to the mūlavar and to the utsavamūrti, after which votive buffalo are offered by individuals, always at the kolaikkal. Until ten o'clock that evening, pūjās follow one another upon request in the sanctuary. At ten o'clock, the pūcāri makes three tours around the temple with Kālī's karagam on his head, and then goes to submerge the karagam in a nearby river. The bronze head is taken to the temple, placed before the mūlavar, and receives a pūjā. Finally, after midnight, Kālī returns to the house of the administrator. The latter presides by rule over the two sacrifices, seated on the temple steps.

The brevity and apparent simplicity of this ritual are somewhat disappointing after the endless sudden turns to which we have become accustomed. It is possible that not all the Kālīs in Dhārāpuram are treated in the same manner, but this one appears to be the most important. The Maca Kāḷiyammaṉ temple to the east is provided with a kolaikkal analogous to that of Periya Kāḷiyammaṉ, and a buffalo is slain there; but I know nothing of its ritual. Let us note, oversight excepted, that Karuppu's knives have played no part whatsoever, unless by the fact that they are the deified replicas of the sacrificial weapon. But it would not be surprising if one or the other of the pūjās that surround the two main sacrifices were intended for him. Above all, we shall retain from the ritual of Periya Kāḷiyammaṉ the appearance of the goddess's severed head, which we believe to be localized in the eastern parts of Tamilnadu, and the fact that its well-delimited cultural role relates it to the kumbha, which—filled with water, decorated with margosa leaves, and placed before the goddess's mūlavar—habitually serves as the goddess's temporary representation. Her garlands, which have remained the same for three days, are submerged with the karagam as elsewhere one immerses the kumbha. This feature becomes even more striking when it is known that another severed head, this one explicitly identified as Reṇukā by the country people met at these places, intervenes in the

Tillāpuriyamman festival on the northern boundary in Māci (February-March). We have no details on the celebrations. They last three days (from Wednesday to Friday) and include only votive sacrifices. Reṇukā's head is also placed in a karagam, and at an unspecified moment of the festival she goes "on horseback" to the river (that is, probably on a *kudirai-vahana*, a painted wooden horse on a pedestal). Curiously, terra-cotta horses are offered as ex-votos to Tillāpuriyamman. As to her utsavamūrti, which stands and has four arms like the mūlavar, it is placed on the third day in the maṇḍapa's swing to receive the homage of her devotees. After this, she is carried to the Māriyamman temple (below), decorated, and then taken out on procession in the bazaar within the town.

●● *Analysis*

We shall return to this account in a general analysis of the goddess cults of this region, but for now it seems that the significant feature would be precisely this severed head of the sacrificed goddess. It guarantees that the Reṇukā myth remains in the background. Would the horses that appear in Tillāpuri as the goddess's vehicle and as ex-votos ultimately be an emergence of the aśvamedha theme?

All our Kālīs bear the tāli and poṭṭu of married women. Once again, the question arises: how can Kālī be married, and to whom? Local responses diverge. The very talkative wife of a paṇḍāram does not hesitate to say that Kālī is married to Karuppu. But nothing in the ritual here would allow one to suspect this, unless Karuppu is the buffalo and the sacrifice could be conceived as a marriage—ideas that are not entirely absent elsewhere, as we have seen. At the other end of the hierarchical ladder of informants, a gurukkaḷ from the Agastīśvara temple (after Śiva's local name) conforms prudently to "orthodoxy" by asserting that Kālī is not married. If a tāli and poṭṭu are there (he has apparently never viewed the local Kālīs, whose cult, moreover, does not call for any gurukkaḷ), it is by mistake. As for the paṇḍāram of Cinna Kālī, who is the husband of the audacious and talkative informant just mentioned, he admits that the Kālīs bear the insignia of a married woman, but wishes to admit nothing further for fear he will be asked to whom they are married! We must thus recognize that there is a more or less conscious problem that the ritual in its way brings to the fore, though less at Dhārāpuram than elsewhere.

● *Māriyamman*

The Māriyamman temple at Dhārāpuram is incontestably as much in the center of the town as the boundary temples remain effectively on the fringes of the inhabited zone, testifying to the stability of this civic center.[160] It is a matter of a rectangular sanctuary in which the sanctum opens onto a maṇḍapa. Oriented toward the east, the building is fronted by a little square sanctuary that shelters a cylindrical post of smooth black stone approximately one meter high: the *māriyammaṇuḍaiya kambam*, "the post of Māriyam-

[160]It is not here a matter of raising the problem that this stability poses for the contemporary period. Economists would no doubt rather speak of stagnation. It seems that the families from Kongunad presently flow to the large urban centers of India, above all to Mumbai and Delhi, and that the exodus would be particularly large in this region.

maṉ." The latter is mounted on a socle approached by three steps (plate 87). In the sanctum, the goddess is standing and has four arms bearing the customary attributes. Gaṇeśa stands guard in the maṇḍapa to the left of the door, and Bhairava, to the right, faces south. In the southeast corner of the maṇḍapa, a small subshrine is dedicated to a benevolent Pēcciyammaṉ who cradles a child on her knees. She receives only votive offerings, even if she has a part in the daily pūjā performed by the paṇḍāram attached to the temple, and she is not involved in the annual festival.

●● *Description of the Festival*

The tiruviḻā takes place in Paṅguni and lasts seventeen days. The first day must be a Tuesday, but the exact date is determined by the *maṇiyam* (the superintendent of all the temple festivals in the locality). Thus on the first appointed Tuesday, thirty Vaḷḷuvar families (a section of Paṟaiyars who act as astrologers, soothsaying for the caste) go out in search of a post forked with three branches that they cut from a pipal or a banyan. They place the post under the tree from which it has been taken, worship it, and then proceed with it to the house of the person called *periya taṉattukkārar,* literally, "the richest man." He is a Veḷḷāḷa Kavuṇḍar. The post is again worshipped. The same Vaḷḷuvars—who have already received their first recompense at this time—walk with the post in the town, visiting each house and collecting money for themselves. Once the collection has been concluded, they take the post to the "royal canal," the Rājavāykkāl, and put it in the water. It will remain there for roughly one hour and is from now on no longer in the Vaḷḷuvars' hands. Beginning at six in the evening, six paṇḍāram priests participate in the celebration that unfolds near the Rājavāykkāl under the direction of the maṇiyam, a Kavuṇḍar (Veḷḷāḷa or Paḍaiyāṭci?), and the *nīrōḍumāṇiyakkārar* (the official in charge of the distribution of canal water into the fields). The regular pūcāri prepares the goddess's kumbha at his house, fills it with water, and decorates it, after which he carries it to the canal near the post. He receives a kaṅkaṇa from another paṇḍāram and then draws the post from the water and places it in front of the kumbha. He offers pūjā to the post and then carries it to the temple, while another paṇḍāram without a kaṅkaṇa takes charge of the kumbha. The kumbha is then placed near Māriyammaṉ, where it will remain throughout the festival.

The post is the object of all attention. In front of the stone kambam, between it and the sanctuary, a hole has been dug to erect the post. But the paṇḍāram begins by sacrificing a ram to the post. The animal has been purchased by the maṇiyam with money he had collected for the festival, and it is thus an offering of the collectivity. The severed head is put in the hole where it is crushed with the end of the post before the latter is erected above it. From this moment until the fifteenth day, men and women bring water that they pour over the post. At the same time, every evening the utsava-mūrti of Māriyammaṉ is taken out in procession around the town, carried on a simple pedestal. She stops each time at different points to receive offerings from those who have a special right to make them (*kaṭṭaḷai*), and only returns to the temple the following morning at about ten.

On the thirteenth day, a Sunday—there are thus eleven days upon which nothing unusual takes place in the temple itself, other than repeated waterings of the post—the pūcāri brings two pots to the temple that have been made by the potter (Maṇṇuḍaiyaṉ).

The pot intended to contain fire is cut in two and the two halves are fitted together, one inside the other. The pūcāri prepares the fire in front of the goddess by putting camphor into it and six or seven kinds of twigs. The faithful who have made vows bring clarified butter that they pour into the fire—the Vedic homa par excellence—or a little sandalwood. Once again, we see the pūcāri take the pūcaṭṭi in his arms and do a pradakṣiṇā of the temple, dancing, before he places the firepot in the forked top of the post. For a certain time, the musicians go around the temple and the pot, and then the pūcāri takes the pot up again and places it in the sanctuary to the left of Bhairava. At no time is there any question of the other clay pot that the pūcāri brought to the temple together with the pūcaṭṭi. There is thus no reason to think that a pot of water replaces the pot of fire on the post. At the very most, it can be supposed that the second pot was filled with water and decorated with neem leaves to be placed somewhere near the goddess in the sanctum, as was the case in Tōṭṭampatti (above, p. 194). The only difficulty is that this new kumbha of the goddess doubles the one that had been brought at the outset and placed in front of the mūlavar.[161]

For three days, from Sunday to Tuesday, the same pūcaṭṭi rite is repeated. This brings us to the festival's fifteenth day, on which the watering of the posts by the residents of the locality and the nocturnal processions of the utsavamūrti come to their end. On the sixteenth day, the devotees who have made vows to do so each prepare a small pūcaṭṭi near the Rājavāykkāl (there can be as many as seven hundred). They come to the temple in procession, men and women, carrying their pūcaṭṭis and dancing. They make a tour of the sanctuary and place their firepots before Māriyamman̲, along with offerings of coconuts and bananas. The pūcāri offers pūjā to the goddess and sprinkles all the pūcaṭṭis with lustral water from the pūjā. The same actors then take up their pots again and go to immerse them in the canal. On this same sixteenth day, in the morning, all the women of good caste come to prepare poṅgal in front of the sanctuary and return that evening with māviḷakkus, which they offer to the goddess; this is a ritual obligation and not the consequence of a vow.

Early Thursday morning, the pūcāri tears out the post and goes to immerse it too in the canal. At the time of removing it, he cuts a pumpkin in half. At least this is what the maṇiyam[162] says, who accompanies this detail, surprising in the present context, with a commentary: it is no longer possible to sacrifice an animal in the middle of town, he says, thus indicating that certain substitutions are very conscious. He was not present at the beginning of the interview with the paṇḍāram, who had mentioned the sacrifice of a ram, and the two men were unable to get in tune. We will thus never know whether the pūcāri sacrifices a second ram when he tears out the post, or whether a pumpkin replaced the first ram that the paṇḍāram had mentioned. When the post is put in the water, the kaṅkaṇas are removed and also cast into the canal.

[161]In reality, and in the absence of any possibility of verifying the information now, the most plausible hypothesis is that the pūcāri brought the two pots on the first, and not the thirteenth, day, and that the pūcaṭṭi would have been left awaiting use until the thirteenth.

[162]At the end of the questioning, this personage of wider office took the place of Cinna Kālī's paṇḍāram, who had fallen prey to violent anger at his wife, the chatterbox already mentioned who had expressed an original idea!

The maṇiyam, after consultation with the paṇḍāram, whom he calms down, also affirms that Māriyamman was unmarried, but that for the period of the festival she is married to the post. After the latter's disappearance, she is widowed and no longer wears the tāli and poṭṭu. This is thus one more example where the notion of a marriage between the goddess and the post during the ritual is conscious. We neglected, however, to ask what the permanent kambam, at whose base the wooden post is installed, would be. Although it plays no part in the festival, it is involved in the daily worship of the goddess. Neither of the two, in any case, receives a precise identification. It would be normal for Māriyamman, if she really is the widow of Jamadagni, not to habitually wear the insignia of a married woman.

●● *Analysis*

Let us first observe that here the pūcaṭṭi rite adds the three days of exposure on the post with the dance of the priest to the supplementary day intended for the votive pūcaṭṭis, thus accounting for the festival's seventeen days where one would expect a pattern of sixteen days. Nevertheless, the poṅgal and māviḷakku rites also take place on the sixteenth day, but this displacement is connected with the rite of uprooting the post, which is deferred to the seventeenth day because of the votive rites. The large firepot is in the arms of the pūcāri longer than it is on the forked top of the post, and at first sight it is the dance of the torture victim that becomes the important element. If the paṇḍāram is indeed possessed by the goddess, and if the interpretation proposed earlier remains valid, we would say that the Earth-Reṇukā is mistreated for a longer duration by her burning husband than the latter is by the asuric post. It is she who is subjected to all the consequences of this two-sided disorder: the Brahman husband, although she would merit the pleasures of the life of a princess; and the asuric husband, given to her in the ritual, who may, according to the Karṇāṭaka myth, be the Buffalo (or the one who eats buffalo), or, according to the epic, Arjuna Kārtavīrya coveting the Brahman's cow. The conjunction of the post and the pūcaṭṭi evokes the catastrophic encounter of the burning Brahman, or his son, with the abusive Kṣatriya. Beneath the myth emerges the sacrificial module of the aśvamedha, with twelve days of preparation and three days of soma pressing, in which the true sacrificial victim is the goddess embodied in her pūcāri.

The post, and it alone, has here also a real affinity with water. Perhaps it might also contain a hidden fire that is to be kept latent by pouring water on it. The two (or three) registers of interpretation do not exclude each other, and it would be best to keep them together. We are here quite certain that the water exclusively concerns the post and has no direct relationship with the pūcaṭṭi, since the watering begins on the first day. The initial ritual beneath the tree from which the post has been cut is not unrelated to the preparation of the Vedic yūpa (above, pp. 33-34), apart from the detail that it is in the hands of an "untouchable" caste, which leaves no doubt as to its low status. Otherwise, the search for a species with milky sap is confirmed, since here one has a choice between two varieties of *Ficus* figuring among the "trees with milk." But this sap—above all when it is a matter of the pipal—is almost certainly the symbol of śukra, semen. The water that will inundate it for fifteen days could thus represent a "feminine" complement intended above all to contain its virile ardor in appropriate bounds. In other

words, water could here substitute for the material of the śamī of which Pōtu Rāju is fashioned in Āndhra. At the same time, it is not unfitting to recall that the common enemy of Reṇukā and Jamadagni is Arjuna Kārtavīrya, king of the marshes in his capital of Māhiṣmatī, and that the seducer Buffalo (possibly Karuppu) is also fond of water. In Dhārāpuram, water is no longer poured over the man possessed by the goddess who bears her pūcaṭṭi, and with the hindsight provided by the present variant of the rite, it is possible to see in the water poured on the bearer of the firepot at Cennimalai (and at Kannapuram) a precaution intended to limit precisely the effects of the pūcaṭṭi, rather than an effort to extinguish it or to attenuate its burning. As is the case with the low-status post, it is a question of circumscribing, not of suppressing.

It is not entirely a matter of chance that the rituals collected in Dhārāpuram pertaining to the Kālīs of the boundaries and the Māriyamman at the center appear to be poorer and less readable than those in Cennimalai-Civanmalai. One observes that the gurukkaḷs of the large Śiva temple do not at any time participate in the worship—which informants confirm—although Māriyamman's utsavamūrti is ordinarily kept in the Agastīśvara temple. At the level of an urban locality, everything transpires as if the solidarities had become slack or were less clearly inscribed in a cultic totality. The most faithful of the goddess's devotees remain the landowning castes, but their knowledge is perhaps too cut off from its source to be able to maintain itself at a certain level. The same applies to their paṇḍāram priests. To be sure, it would be rash to draw conclusions from such a rapid survey of the situation in Dhārāpuram. But when one compares it with what one finds at the Māriyamman temple at Samayapuram (Tiruchirapalli Dt., Lalgudi Tk.; see below), where by official decision all is in the hands of gurukkaḷs and under the management of Vaiṣṇava Brahmans from the Śrīraṅgam temple, the Dhārāpuram Māriyamman temple, where the relation between priests of upper and lower castes appears to be severed, makes one aware of the fragility, in today's urban context, of the equilibrium that must have prevailed for centuries and kept alive the links between all the levels of worship. Of course, the religious link could only be preserved insofar as the society remained integrated and the caste system functioned locally without too much friction, and the settled community signified a clearly woven fabric of exchange of all types.

ii. Kaḍattūr Marudu Kāḷiyamman

Nevertheless, it was worth finding out whether a more profuse ritual might be found in the vicinity of Dhārāpuram recalling those at Cennimalai-Civanmalai. Because the ritual of the goddess of the boundary seemed to be the most impoverished, we chose to investigate the Marudu Kāḷiyamman temple in Kaḍattūr (Coimbatore Dt., Udumalpet Tk.), all the while knowing that a fragile equilibrium also prevailed there. At the time of an initial visit in 1975, the kolaikkal was without its transverse bar and the buffalo sacrifice, indeed the whole goddess festival, was no more than a memory. But in 1981 the kolaikkal had once again found a round wooden cross bar. Two years previously the locality had resumed the celebration of the festival, including its normal conclusion, the buffalo sacrifice. The place was no less tempting for its mythical past. Behind the temple opening to the north (on the village's southern boundary) is a kind of (natural?) earthen platform called Kōṭṭaimēḍu, the "mound of a fortress." This would be the location of

the palace of Virāṭa, who thus appears again. Yet one need not seek any link with Virāṭapuram, even though the actual Dhārāpuram is near. Every locality develops its myth and organizes its countryside, not without relation to the environment, but without concern for topographical order. This Virāṭa's palace is linked, at least mythically, to the place where Virāṭa's cows were normally penned: Kārattoḻuvūr, where another Kālī named Aḻaganāṭciyammaṉ is to be found along with her kolaikkal (plate 86). Every day hundreds of pots of milk were transported between Kārattoḻuvūr and Kōṭṭaimēḍu for the needs of the palace, and each day a carrier stumbled at the same place, fell, and spilled his pot of milk. They thus began to dig at that spot and found a liṅga,[163] for which a temple had to be built. The latter is identified as the present Arjuneśvara temple, whose construction the gurukkaḷ more modestly attributes to King Vikramacōḷa (beginning of the twelfth century). Śiva is here "the Lord of Arjuna," and his sanctuary is parallel to that of his wife, whose local name is Gomatī, goddess of cows. Although the two temples of Kaḍattūr and Gomatī-Arjuneśvara would be ritually connected, the myth that the gurukkaḷ tells about the second is different, although no one finds this surprising. Whereas Marudu Kāḷiyammaṉ is still linked with the human settlement, the double temple of Gomatī-Arjuneśvara is isolated on the bank of the same Amarāvatī River that once flowed at the foot of the śamī in Tillāpuri (above, pp. 204-5), tucked away in a grove dominated by coconut palms. It would also appear quite natural to choose it as the site where Duryodhana hid the cows he stole from Virāṭa—the cowpen idea remains—and from which Arjuna took them back to Virāṭa's palace, alias Kōṭṭaimēḍu. The local name of Śiva is thus explained, at the same time as the hesitation over the interpretation of that of the Kālī of Kaḍattūr: according to the *Tamil Lexicon, marutu* would be the name of the arjuna tree (*marutu* or *nīrmarutu: Terminalia arjuna,* L.), which would constitute an interesting reappearance of Arjuna, who effectively dominates the episode of the cattle raid like that of the śamī in the *Virāṭaparvan.*[164] This is also the interpretation we were given at the time of our 1975 visit. But Kālī's present paṇḍāram prefers to see in *Marudu,* or *maruda,* a deformation of the name Madurai, the large city in the south from which the goddess would have come. He is not less convinced of this than that Kōṭṭaimēḍu is the site of Virāṭa's palace.

[163]This banal story about the discovery of a liṅga has thousands of replicas in India. Only the double reference to the MBh lends it a particular interest. But the liṅga itself is not banal: one could describe it as the outline of a human silhouette in which only the shoulders and a faceless head are distinguishable. Why precisely this reminiscence of the yūpa in a sculpture that appears to be incomplete, hewn in a stone which, after all, could be "natural," *svayambhū,* as the priest asserts?

[164]We have once again an identification of a plant that is not unanimous, just as in the case of the śamī. Cf. *Wealth of India* 6, p. 472, which does not include the term *marudu,* but does have a *marudam,* unknown as a tree in the *Tamil Lexicon,* and which would be a variety of *Myrica* (Linn.) called in English "box myrtle." Under *Terminalia arjuna* (Roxb.) (10, p. 161), the same catalog cites the Hindi *arjuna* and the Tamil *vellamatta.* This latter term is absent from the T.L. and it must by all evidence be restored to the spoken form *vellaimarutu,* for which the T.L. (p. 3803) refers to the *nīrmarutu,* thus to the species listed as *Terminalia arjuna* (*vellai* = "white," which *arjuna* also means in Sanskrit). It thus seems that there would be agreement here as to the plant, but that the information given by the Tamil informant was insufficient. The same T.L., however (ibid.), gives another use of the same term, which it translates as "flowering murdah," and which could well be the *marudam.* The two species are not at all related.

The temple, enclosed by a wall provided with a solid open-work door at the entrance, includes the sanctuary proper with its sanctum, an ardhamaṇḍapa, and a maṇḍapa larger than the rest of the structure. On either side of the sanctuary's door, a male *bhūta* (on the right) and a female bhūta stand watch. On the sanctuary's axis and beginning at the main door of the enclosure wall, one finds first a kolaikkal of the same type as at Dhārāpuram, a double balipīṭha, and then another balipīṭha. On the right in the courtyard, the northwest corner is occupied by the small subshrine of an aniconic Māriyamman̲, who therefore faces east. Then, along the western outer wall, on a kind of low bench, a Śāstā and some nāgakkals are aligned. Somewhat nearer the sanctuary, another bench parallel to the first supports a lion and a stone called Tennamaratta (?), about whom nothing is known. To the left, that is, near the eastern wall of the enclosure and facing west, there is a roughly hewn and unreadable statue of Kuppāyi, a goddess who is perhaps only a Ka̲ruppa̲lagi or Ka̲ruppāyi detached here from her matrimonial relationship with Kāttavarāyan̲. Ka̲ruppu, for his part, is entirely absent.[165] In the sanctum, the goddess is standing, with eight arms, and an anthropomorphic asura appears on her pedestal. She bears a close resemblance to the Periya Kālī on the southern boundary of Dhārāpuram, apart from the detail that her lower two arms are broken. Gaṇeśa, facing east, alone occupies the ardhamaṇḍapa, installed against the right wall. Finally, as was noted, a jyotistambha stands in front of the temple outside the enclosure.

• *Description of the Festival*

The festival, revived two years before my visit in 1979, takes place in Vaikāsi (May-June), which seems to relate it to the summer solstice, the highest point of the sun's ascent in the boreal hemisphere. It must last twelve days and begin on a Wednesday. But taking this assertion into account, a discrepancy will be seen between the high point of the festival and the real breakdown of the days. For everything to coincide, it would be necessary to not count the first day; but this would reduce the length of the festival to eleven days, which is no more satisfying. It is therefore better to note an error in the manner of reckoning and to see in the length of the festival the result of a dominant pattern.

The first day, a Wednesday, is marked by the summoning of a gurukkal from the Arjuneśvara temple; he is to conduct a formal puṇyavācana: kalaśa filled with water, homa, and purification of the premises with the water from the kalaśa. The gurukkal gives the rest of the lustral water to Kālī's paṇḍāram priest, who uses it for an abhiṣeka of the mūlavar. The goddess is then decorated and offered pūjā and a naivedya. After she has been thus attended to and fed a vegetarian meal, the door of the sanctuary is closed in order to sacrifice a goat at the kolaikkal. The *kāṇiyāḷan*—the title of an official involved with canal irrigation, a Kavuṇḍar—slays the goat himself while a Kavuṇḍar kottukkārar presides. The goat is offered by all the villagers. The head and the body are given to the pūcāri, which seems to indicate that the offering goes to the goddess,

[165]That is, if one cannot detect him under the unintelligible *tennamaratta*, which is probably a stone originally placed at the foot of a tree (*maram*), perhaps a coconut palm, *tenn̲ai*. But then Ka̲ruppu would no longer be beneath a tree with milky sap.

notwithstanding the contradiction presented by the prior closing of her sanctuary. This is neither the first nor the last observation to be made as to the ambivalence of the goddess's diet: animal victims are sacrificed to her, but she consumes only vegetarian offerings (see above, p. 153 and n. 79). At the boundary, one can see that the offering is mediated by the kolaikkal, but no one here suggests that it is deified or represents anything besides the sacrificial post. In particular, it is offered no form of worship apart from that which would be constituted by the decapitation of goats and buffalo. There is thus no good reason to extrapolate facts known elsewhere. Kālī's sanctuary remains closed in this way until the eighth day.

On the eighth day, a Thursday—and it is here that an error apparently slips into the calculation, since the eighth day would have to be a Wednesday, like the first—the paṇḍāram, the kottukkārar, and a few villagers go to fetch the utsavamūrti of Marudu Kālī, which is kept at the neighboring Naṭarāja temple, and convey it to the Gomatī-Arjuneśvara temple. They place it before Gomatī's mūlavar and the gurukkaḷ of the temple performs pūjā, first to Gomatī and then to the utsavamūrti of Kālī. The latter is then taken to the Marudu Kālī temple on a *siṃha-vāhana*, a painted wooden lion, which suffices to oppose Kālī to Gomatī, before whom is a Nandin identical to that of Arjuneśvara. Upon her arrival, the sanctuary still being closed, a goat is sacrificed at the kolaikkal for the protection of the villagers: the goddess is angry, since for eight days she has had neither meal nor pūjā. The utsavamūrti apparently attends the sacrifice. Finally, the sanctuary is opened and the utsavamūrti is placed in front of the mūlavar. The paṇḍāram offers an abhiṣeka and a pūjā to both mūrtis.

The ninth day marks the festival's culmination. To understand that so many things can occur during this time, particularly so much coming and going between the goddess's temple and Kōṭṭaimēḍu, it must be known that the two points are separated by no more than two hundred meters. Thus, early in the morning, the kāṇiyāḷaṉ leads a (hired) mare to Kōṭṭaimēḍu—the site of Virāṭa's palace, one recalls—bringing at the same time a new sari, a coconut, bananas, one and a quarter rupees (in coins) tied in a corner of the sari, etc., all of which are placed in a basket. He has purchased these items with money from the collectivity. The paṇḍāram joins him with musicians and offers a pūjā to the sari. He "calls" all the goddesses. The name of this rite is already known to us: *ammai aḻaittal*. But the paṇḍāram specifies that all the goddesses make a total of sixty-four, including Marudu Kālī. He calls sixty-three of them. After this solemn convocation, the kāṇiyāḷaṉ places the basket on the mare and proceeds to lead her to the temple, all the while holding his hand on the basket, accompanied by the paṇḍāram and the musicians, not to speak of the throng of devotees. But before they set out, he sacrifices a goat to the mare. The procession arrives at the temple and the mare is taken into the courtyard up to the balipīṭha. There the paṇḍāram takes the basket she has been carrying and she is sent back to her owner, her role having come to an end. The priest dresses Kālī in the new sari and offers her, and the utsavamūrti, a pūjā.

Immediately thereafter, the same movable mūrti is put on a *bhūtavāhana*, a vehicle this time representing one of those unattractive demons who, at this level, are not distinguished from rākṣasas, or from ferocious munis with protruding teeth. The same actors set out again in procession toward Kōṭṭaimēḍu. On the way, the bhūta stops at different places, altogether thirty-four, and each halt signifies that a goat must be

sacrificed *hic et nunc*. At Kōṭṭaimēḍu, a goat is sacrificed to the goddess, who is here Vi̲lundūrpaḷḷi Amman̲, represented by an aniconic stone to which nothing would draw one's attention in this indefinite rocky terrain. The procession returns to the temple, doing a partial pradakṣiṇā of the ūr, but above all stopping at a small Durgā temple (south of our temple, but not far from it or from Kōṭṭaimēḍu). The paṇḍāram specifies that this Durgā is also a boundary goddess, but she would today appear to be in the middle of a field. Four goats are sacrificed at the four corners of the small building. When the bhūta carrying the goddess returns to the Kālī temple, as many goats are sacrificed as there are goddesses, a total of sixty-four. The blood from each of the sixty-four goats put to death on this itinerary is collected in an unfired clay pot carried by the Maṇṇuḍaiyan̲ (potter). When Kālī's utsavamūrti has reentered the maṇḍapa of the temple, the kāṇiyāḷan̲, the kottukkārar, and the musicians accompany the pūcāri and the potter to Kōṭṭaimēḍu, where they place the pot of blood beside Valayakara Amman̲, another goddess represented by a beautiful sculpted stone that no doubt originally had little to do with this ritual.[166] It was probably brought here from elsewhere and found a new purpose. If the name of the goddess was correctly noted, it would mean "she who has bangles." The pūcāri performs a simple ārati with camphor to the goddess and the pot, and then the potter takes the pot and the group sets out for the Durgā temple, where they do its pradakṣiṇā. The pot containing blood is then placed in front of Yacca̲ni Amman̲ (no doubt <Skt. *yakṣiṇī*), a small crude mūrti before which the priest again waves a little burning camphor. Finally, the pot and its contents are cast into the "royal canal" before the return to the Marudu Kālī temple.

Following this "terrible" rite, seven persons, among them the kāṇiyāḷan̲, kottukkārar, and pūcāri, again take up the basket. Placing a new sari, coconut, bananas, etc., in it without forgetting the one and a quarter rupees knotted in one of the sari's corners, they run to Kōṭṭaimēḍu crying out: *umāpali umāpali*, which is intended, whatever the meaning of the words, to keep people at a distance and silent. They return by way of the Durgā temple. The goddess is dressed in the new sari and receives offerings. As to the significance of the shouted words, which seems to be lost for the participants, the most obvious meaning would be: "offering to Umā." But Umā is not a "terrible" form of the Goddess and she is Śiva's wife. The only offering here is the contents of the basket intended for Durgā. Immediately after having returned to the temple, the same group sets out again in the same direction, the pūcāri carrying a metal pot filled with water, as well as a bell. They advance crying out *araiccimaṇi araiccimaṇi*, while the bell rings and the pūcāri pours a little water along the way. They return again by way of the Durgā temple. It seems that in this instance the cry means "the queen's bell," *araicci* being the feminine form corresponding to *araica̲n*, "king" (*Tamil Lexicon*, 138).

At this point, the comings and goings between the temple and Kōṭṭaimēḍu end. There follows a dīpārādhanā at the temple. Meanwhile, at about two in the afternoon women from the village come to prepare poṅgal in the temple courtyard. When the dīpārādhanā has been completed it is nearing six o'clock, and the kāṇiyāḷan̲ brings a buffalo to the

[166]It is a flat rectangular stone precariously erected on the Kōṭṭaimēḍu terrain. It bears bas-reliefs of diverse objects, no doubt with symbolic meanings, identical ones being found elsewhere. I have at present no idea as to the original use of this stone.

temple's entrance. A pit has been dug previously between the uprights of the kolaikkal to enable the buffalo to be at the desired level. The kāṇiyāḷaṉ is at once both the offerer of the buffalo—manifestly an eminent notable of the ūr—and the sacrificer. The pit, contrary to what takes place elsewhere, does not serve to bury the animal's head. The body is taken away by the Paṟaiyar drummer while the head is interred near the canal. The sacrifice is offered to Marudu Kāḷiyammaṉ, whose sanctuary is open, but it is her utsavamūrti, coming out from the maṇḍapa, that attends the putting to death. After this first buffalo, an indeterminate number of votive buffalo are offered. All the heads are buried near the canal, while the bodies are taken away by the offerers. It is not said what they do with them if they are not buffalo-meat eaters, which must be the case for many of them. The pit is then filled in and the pūcāri offers a complete ceremony of worship to the goddess. The utsavamūrti is taken out for a pradakṣiṇā of the temple and the devotees then present her with their poṅgal before taking it to their homes.

On the tenth day, returning to an āgamic form of worship, the processional icon is taken through the village for the devotees to be able to sprinkle it with turmeric water, and is then returned directly to the Naṭarāja temple, where it is kept. The eleventh day is solemnized by a large abhiṣeka and a pūjā to the goddess. So the festival concludes, counting only eleven days according to the calculation of the paṇḍāram, who stressed that the eighth day would be a Thursday. But if the first day is indeed a Wednesday, the festival effectively comprises twelve days. Thus the eighth day, a Wednesday, would be devoid of activity, which is apparently not possible.

- *Analysis*

We do not know if Kaḍattūr has a Māriyammaṉ in a central location. The question would have been worth asking, even if the time for a new study were lacking, but the structure of the Kālī ritual would lead us to suppose that it is complementary to a Māriyammaṉ festival at which a temporary post would assume the usual role. Having said this, we shall confine ourselves here to comparing the Marudu Kālī tiruviḻā with the Kālī festivals already presented, since, notwithstanding a different date and duration, we find familiar elements and even a fundamental schema under the new attire.

The festival officially lasts twelve days, a duration that corresponds to the preparation period for the Māriyammaṉ rituals. But for what is essential, it can be reduced to the eighth and ninth days (according to the paṇḍāram's calculations). These are also the important days at Cennimalai at the Ellaimākāḷiyammaṉ temple (above, pp. 161 ff.), where the festival lasts ten days, and at Tōṭṭampatti, where the celebration conforms to the long model of sixteen days and has two high points: the eighth and ninth days, and then the sixteenth. It will be remembered that at Tōṭṭampatti the ritual tacitly combines the cults of Māriyammaṉ and Kālī (above, pp. 192 ff.), from which ensues the density that is allocated over two moments: the eighth and ninth days, which resume the rites pertaining to Māriyammaṉ (that of the pūcaṭṭi then continues for eight days); and the sixteenth night to the seventeenth day, which present a liturgy that relates to what takes place on the ninth day at Kaḍattūr. As for the Kālī in Civaṉmalai, the unfolding of her festival traces itself onto that of Māriyammaṉ in a sixteen-day model in which twelve "preparatory" days have been isolated, followed by three central days—the emergence of an aśvamedha reduced to its essential schema. The importance of the eighth and ninth

days is probably to be seen in relation to the great tradition of the autumnal Durgāpūjā as it is followed in the north, where one speaks of Mahāṣṭamī and Mahānavamī, the "great eighth" night and the "great ninth," the night from the eighth to the ninth day being normally that of the buffalo sacrifice.

Despite the variants, another structural element is common to all these boundary goddess celebrations: the complete sequence that concludes with the buffalo sacrifice, which we have identified as inspired by the tradition of the Vedic aśvamedha, always takes place on a single day or a single night (Tōṭṭampatti). In Kaḍattūr, this results in a staggering rhythm during this day, on which we are not far from the shift back to āgamic ritual, with the sixty-four goddesses, sixty-four goats, and the multiple comings and goings (five altogether) between the temple and Kōṭṭaimēḍu. But we recognize the mare, the calling of the goddesses, and the goat and buffalo sacrifices. Also found there when the mare appears is the doubling of the function of patron of the ritual: at Civaṉmalai, the kottukkārar sufficed for everything, whereas in Tōṭṭampatti, a muppattukkārar comes to double for the kottukkārar to lead the mare. At Kaḍattūr, the canal official assumes this role, but he is also the offerer and executioner of the first goat sacrificed to the goddess on the first day. In fact, he doubles for the kottukkārar throughout the ritual, as he had already done in the abridged Periya Kālī ritual at Dhārāpuram (above, pp. 205-6). The importance of this personage is obviously linked to that of the Rāja-vāykkāl, the canal that is "royal" for the entire life of the region. Its importance is probably not purely economic, although one should not minimize the arrangement that enables the irrigation of the fields. But the Amarāvatī River is very near (it borders the Arjuneśvara temple), and despite its celestial name (that of the city of the gods), it is in no way associated with the ritual. The heads of the sacrificed buffalo are all interred on the bank of the canal, no doubt to recall the buffalo's affinity with water, but above all to explicitly associate the canal with the cult of the goddess and the prosperity it should bring to the country. This participation of the canal in the festival evokes the cults of deities situated on the banks of reservoirs. Like such tanks, the canal no doubt has a boundary function, but above all it is included in the exercise of royal power and is thus present as one of the poles of the cult, the other two being the temple and the Kōṭṭaimēḍu "palace." In short, the entire ritual is modeled on a site valorized by a symbolic royal presence, perhaps in order to bring to the fore a privileged relationship between the goddess and the king. It is, moreover, time to acknowledge that it is difficult to imagine that a fragment of the aśvamedha could have been introduced into a cult of boundary goddesses solely through the communication of Brahmans, independently of a certain royal "practice" and the accommodations it would have had to make with theory simply in order for it to exist. Whatever kings and dynasties might be responsible, the conjunction effectuated at a particular moment or in the course of time between the story of the Pāṇḍavas, the horse sacrifice (present, it is true, in that story), and the buffalo sacrifice to the boundary goddess (with the royal variants of this ritual) has nothing to it but logic. It is even more satisfying that Arjuna should be the epic's central figure through the local choice of episodes from the *Virāṭaparvan*.[167]

[167]We have no well-founded historical data regarding these cults, other than that very old titles belonging

We shall, therefore, on the basis of what is already known, try to order the multiple events of the ninth day, subsequent to the latency period represented by the week during which the sanctuary is closed. It would be tempting to restrict the comparison to the rituals in which the mare, the calling of the goddesses, and the buffalo sacrifice figure, as they do here; but that would mean disregarding precisely the importance of the eighth and ninth days of the Kālī festival at Cennimalai. What is worse, it would preclude our recognizing that certain apparently new elements hold significations expressed elsewhere in a different manner. Our first observation: to the profuse multiplication of goddesses is opposed the absence of the kumbha, the pot that temporarily represents the goddess and is placed before her at the moment when the ritual assumes its whole dramatic dimension. The kumbha is also absent in Dhārāpuram, but there it is replaced by the bronze head of Kālī installed in a karagam. Now, in Cennimalai, it is the kumbha-goddess together with her possessed man who receives a poṭṭu of fresh blood after a day of blood sacrifices that have provided the blood for the dousing of Muniyappaṉ. And at Tōṭṭampatti, it is at the moment when the kumbha is installed in front of Kālī on the eighth day that the goddess receives a poṭṭu and tāli; in other words, that her marriage is celebrated (without the husband being specified). At Tōṭṭampatti this is probably a sequence that implicitly involves Māriyammaṉ, since it is followed by the pūcaṭṭi rite. But one cannot forget what made Kālī's "marriage" at Cennimalai (above, pp. 161 ff., and 185-92) stand out, namely, that Muniyappaṉ was probably the form assumed there by Jamadagni, the Brahman and ascetic husband of princess Reṇukā. Kālī is and remains an inferior form of Reṇukā-Māriyammaṉ (which also calls to mind the bronze head in Dhārāpuram), and the popular tradition commits no error in giving her the same husband, unless in accentuating his rākṣasic form. At Kālī's level, there is no longer room to distinguish the angered Brahman husband from the oppressive Kṣatriya or the Buffalo suitor. All are so many representations of the necessary evil over which the goddess ultimately triumphs in the final buffalo sacrifice. At Kaḍattūr, there is no sign of a "marriage," no form of the goddess in which she is said to be married at a particular moment. But between the aśvamedha segment (from the appearance of the mare to its departure from the temple) and the buffalo sacrifice, one observes a succession of comings and goings between Kōṭṭaimēḍu and the sanctuary that is like nothing we have ever seen nor heard of, although that could well point to a meaning. Let us admit that we are at the limit of the comprehensible.

We can thus analyze the long series of steps that precedes the buffalo sacrifice on the ninth day. When the kāṇiyāḷaṉ leads a mare to Kōṭṭaimēḍu with a basket containing offerings to the goddess, we are already on familiar ground. Here again, the mare is a

to the landowning notables (from the period of Ganga supremacy) are found for those locally responsible for organizing the festivals. But one can divine the reason for the pure and simple conjuring away of goddesses in favor of Visnu, Śiva, or Subrahmanya. Buffalo and goat sacrifices were not esteemed by the upper castes (cf. Arokiaswami 1956, 234). The paradox of an apparent continuity between "orthodox" sources and "popular" cults nonetheless subsists, the active presence of landowning castes having no doubt served as a link in a region where the pronounced administrative structure of the villages (*grāmam* and not *ūr*) is noted. But where, when, how, and why this variant of a goddess cult in this restricted area of Kongunad? These questions must remain open, perhaps for a long time. Cf. below, p. 227 and n. 175.

figure of the sovereign goddess, and it is in this capacity that she must attend the rite of calling the goddesses. But the sari in the basket is also a presence of the goddess, since the pūcāri performs a pūjā to it. One recalls how at Civaṉmalai it was a Brahman devotee who received the tray containing the goddess's ornaments and worshipped it, while also feeding the buffalo. Here it is only a question of offerings that will belong to the goddess but are not yet hers. But the pūjā consecrates them, and the kāṇiyāḷaṉ will then be able to place them on the back of the mare, which is a moving form of the goddess. Already completed is the calling of the goddesses, the ammais, whose specific number makes nothing clearer. The mare is at no time treated as even a symbolic victim, but the kāṇiyāḷaṉ sacrifices a goat to her before the procession departs for the temple. This form assumed by the goddess can have no deeper meaning than to evoke the horse sacrifice and the imaginary copulation between the dead horse and the queen. Notwithstanding the return procession, there is no sign that would betray the idea of the mare's prolonged roaming. The reference to the aśvamedha is, therefore, mitigated, even emptied of meaning. On the other hand, I personally cannot refrain from seeing the role of the kāṇiyāḷaṉ, at a time of year (May-June) when the water problem is always acute, as a signaling of the sacrifice of the buffalo, that animal fond of water which symbolizes the asuric Buffalo-King (or indeed the epic Kārtavīrya, king of the marshes). This official, without any doubt linked to the king, is also linked to the goddess who regulates the climate and the entire natural environment. In celebrating the festival of the goddess, it is among other things a matter of ensuring mastery over water and of wresting this mastery from the mythical sovereign of the humid and pestilential zones that are the marshes. One does not deny the necessity of the Buffalo and what it symbolizes; rather, one attempts to subordinate it to the human-divine order that the goddess protects.

Yet it is true that the mare carries the new sari offered to the goddess and that implicitly it is the goddess's sovereignty that is thus recognized by the aśvamedha allusion. The following sequence brings together two circuits that begin from the temple and proceed by way of Kōṭṭaimēḍu and the Durgā temple. The first, confirming the presence of sixty-four goddesses on the site, includes sixty-four goat sacrifices—one of which is to a goddess whose stone is at Kōṭṭaimēḍu but whose name is probably that of a village: Viḷundūrpaḷḷi Ammaṉ, whom the residents of Kaḍattūr do not identify. Was this stone once brought by a local family that has since left? Another accident of history? It matters little: it is one of the sixty-four goddesses and its location on Kōṭṭaimēḍu (where it is not alone) makes it worthy of its own sacrifice. As to the Durgā temple, it could play a role analogous to that of the Vighneśvara temple in the ritual circuits at Tōṭṭampatti, a role of protection against possible obstacles to the successful unfolding of the festival. But apart from the fact that Durgā seems to be associated with Kālī as another goddess of the boundary (isn't she the goddess of royal fortresses who watches over strategic points of the kingdom?), she is hardly comparable to the vegetarian Gaṇeśa. Perhaps she is even fonder of blood than Kālī. For the moment, her shrine receives four goats as sacrifice, apparently offered in the four cardinal directions, which confirms an apotropaic function, but in the sanguinary register. Yet this is not where the main interest lies in this coming and going between the temple and Kōṭṭaimēḍu, in which the goddess is this time represented by her utsavamūrti and borne by a bhūta.

A preliminary remark of more general import: the utsavamūrti is a form of the goddess whose mobility is not its only characteristic. It is a multidimensional mediator: when it goes out on procession in a locality, it is to bring the goddess's benediction and to receive offerings from the houses of her devotees. By definition, it presents the goddess's benevolent face. When a gurukkaḷ—that is, a priest at a pure temple that holds no animal sacrifices—intervenes in the cult of Kālī or Māriyamman̲, his attentions are always addressed to the utsavamūrti, never to the mūlavar. But when the goddess does not seem to be particularly sanguinary, the utsavamūrti may stand in for her. In fact, there is an apparent contradiction here that serves to set in relief the close conjunction of the pure and the impure, of the extreme purity of brahmanical renunciation and the vegetarian cult of upper-caste temples, and impurity in its bloodiest form. In other words, where one opposes pure and impure gods, and vegetarian and nonvegetarian castes, it must not be forgotten that the real social integration of castes must be found somewhere on the religious plane. More precisely, if it remains true to say that Brahmans have, after a fashion, absorbed from renunciation what could be experienced in the world, it is equally true that the impure cults—and above all those of "village goddesses" that are in the hands of landowning, nonvegetarian upper castes (or of kings on the level of the kingdom)—have found means to absorb aspects of renunciation and ascetic practices in their own manner, even if they tend toward the asuric. The sequence now being analyzed offers a good example of this type of process.

Why then is there a bhūta here to convey Kālī's utsavamūrti on the tour that will strew the countryside with goat sacrifices? Let us note that in the paṇḍāram's formulation, it is the bhūta who stops and gives the signal for a new putting to death, while the animal is offered to the goddess. It is the bhūta who calls for the goddess to have a victim. This demon of painted wood materially resembles like a brother the Muṉiyappaṉs found before Ellaimākāḷiyamman̲ at Ceṉṉimalai and Mahākālī at Tōṭṭampatti. In both cases, this strange muni receives all the collective and votive sacrifices, of goats in one case (above, pp. 161 ff.), of goats, rams, or cocks in the other (above, p. 195), with the particularity that he is intentionally doused with the victims' blood. The sacrifices are thus sanguinary to the maximum, and it is the personage of the muni who benefits from the spilled blood. At Ceṉṉimalai, it will be remembered that the blood of the last goat immolated serves to mark with a poṭṭu the kumbha and the man the goddess possesses, and that this entire sanguinary ritual is called "marriage." We were thus able to identify the muni with Jamadagni, the Brahman and ascetic husband of Reṇukā-Māriyamman̲, who had his son decapitate his wife before repenting it and being himself put to death without defending himself by Arjuna Kārtavīrya (another Arjuna!). In Kaḍattūr, this episode of the ritual, like that of the aśvamedha, has lost its intelligibility. But from the muni to the bhūta, the transformation is more plausible than would appear, given the ascetic's violence, which is evidenced as much by the firepot that tortures Māriyamman̲ as by the bloodbath that drenches Ellai Mahākālī.[168] The

[168]This is perhaps the place to remark that, other than her Muṉiyappaṉ, the Kālī at Ceṉṉimalai is guarded by two vividly painted munis—we do not know how long this has been the case, since they are repainted every year—and that the door to Kālī's sanctuary in Kadattūr is flanked by two bhūtas. These are not "doorkeepers" conforming to the current model. The Pirātti Amman̲ in Ceṉṉimalai is also protected by two enormous munis

ascetic—whose son, the great destroyer of Kṣatriyas, has become an avatāra of Viṣṇu—is seen as a rākṣasa, a kind of Brahman of the woods, meat-eating and even cannibalistic, who dooms his wife to catastrophe. If the rite of the pūcaṭṭis to Māriyammaṉ evokes the murderous husband, the blood given prominence in the sacrifices to Muṉiyappaṉ refers rather to the horrible funeral offering that Rāma Jāmadagnya made to his dead father with the blood of the Kṣatriyas, all the while retaining a link to the offering of a small amount of blood from the sacrificial horse into the Vedic fire. The bhūta at Kaḍattūr is the goddess's vehicle: retaining the Sanskrit term, the goddess is indeed Jamadagni's *bhāryā,* the wife as she whom he "must carry, support" (the transcription of this term exists in Tamil—*pāriyai*—but is not in current usage). The bhūta thus appears in the position of husband, even should this not appear to be so upon initial reading, and although it is at the price of a play on words. As to the sixty-four goats slain during a single circuit that is likened to a partial pradakṣiṇā of the (theoretical) locality, these recall that the blood spilled for Jamadagni is that of all the Kṣatriyas slain by his son, and that this occurs in the course of a circumambulation of the site that mimes the wandering of the sacrificial horse and the fighting that must accompany it.

Our exegesis of this episode entails that of the second circuit with the pot of blood: this latter is a transformation of Rāma's blood tarpaṇa to his ancestors in the epic, and of the bloodbath offered to Muṉiyappaṉ at Ceṉṉimalai and Tōṭṭampatti. What had been five pits filled with blood in the text, and was changed to the muni's dousing, now reclaims a container, an unfired clay pot that could, beyond these occurrences, recall something of the horse's hoof from which the blood of the victim is poured into the fire of the aśvamedha. At the same time, light is shed on the halt in front of Valayakara Ammaṉ and the camphor oblation made to her at the same time as to the pot of blood placed near her: the name of this goddess, as was said, has no connection whatsoever with the stone that concretely represents her, but if it indeed means "she who wears bangles," then she is a *married* goddess, wearing jewelry, and she is no doubt there to signify the well-known tirukalyāṇam of Ceṉṉimalai (above, p. 162). At the Durgā temple, it seems that the goddess herself refuses to be implicated in such a blood rite, and a yakṣiṇī demon is found there just when needed to receive the homage of the pot of blood (in the epic, yakṣas and rākṣasas are closely associated and comprise the entourage of Kubera, god of wealth). Ultimately, this pot is submerged, container and contents, in the canal. The casting into the water substitutes for the oblation into the fire: we are moving toward the buffalo sacrifice. If allusion is really made to a marriage in a very veiled manner in this procession with the pot of blood, the husband is not designated and Jamadagni is presumed dead. There is a choice, as with Māriyammaṉ, between Arjuna Kārtavīrya (but he paid with his life for the theft of the Brahman's cow) and the Buffalo. But we shall be wary of choosing, since, either way, the goddess emerges victorious, both from her widowhood and from the attempted abductions, at the time of the immolation of the buffalo.

daubed with paint, similar to those aligned in front of Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ temples on the eastern coast. We suggested Parā Śakti as a possible reading of Pirātti (above, p. 157), but, considering these munis and a myth relating to Mādaṉ, of which we shall soon speak, another interpretation would be tempting: Brahmaśakti, whom we also propose as an hypothesis. See below, pp. 241 ff.

It is this immolation that is announced by the last two circuits of the site, although in a form that would be difficult to decipher without the mythico-ritual backcloth we have set in place. When Durgā is offered a new sari and a series of objects already contained in the basket at the time of the mare's procession to the temple, it is on a circuit that is a call for silence. It is not worth making futile conjectures as to the exact meaning of the cry *umāpali* that is intended to achieve this silence, since it could be a deformation of a cry no longer understood;[169] and although it has not been found in a neighboring ritual, we should not posit that it is simply a substitution. It is enough to recall the tradition of a moment of silence before an animal is put to death, a period when one awaits its sign of acquiescence to its fate, which is still to be found nearly everywhere. It is probably this silence that is demanded here. Logically, the subsequent procession with the goddess's victory bell could take place only after the immolation. But one thing can be settled: in a ritual in which so many transformations have occurred, the movements between the temple and Kōṭṭaimēḍu have come to an end. The buffalo sacrifices will ignore Kōṭṭaimēḍu and entail a shift toward the canal. Moreover, no one knows the significance of these faithfully conserved sequences any longer. But the absence of any dramatization of the buffalo sacrifice is an evident correlate: all the symbolic action unfolds before it occurs, and what remains is only to connect it to the concrete reality of the immolation and interment of the buffalo heads. Something of the sense of decency found in the texts on Vedic ritual is seen in everything that concerns the victim's death.

c. Comparative Analysis

While approaching the Māriyamman̲ temples in the lower Kāverī basin, we saw a question begin to take shape (above, pp. 123-24) that the facts have increasingly raised to the uppermost importance by providing elements of a response. What the rituals in Āndhra reveal in a rudimentary and no doubt degraded form is already a dialectic of the boundary and the center inherent in the worship of grāmadevatās. The protective goddess of the locality is always on the boundary, while the center (more or less theoretical, which matters little since what counts is its symbolic function) does not have a goddess sanctuary but is occupied by a replica of the small post that already appears as a sentinel before the boundary temple. It is this post, always sheltered beneath a pipal (and probably a neem, even should the latter have been smothered by the more robust pipal), that marks the site of the buffalo sacrifice *to the goddess*. For the occasion, a temporary replica of the goddess is fashioned from clay and brought near the post, and it is this representation that attends the sacrifice. But the buffalo is brought there following a circumambulation of the boundary temple and at the end of a long procession in which a man possessed by the goddess appears bearing a pole that is the movable figure of the post. What is impoverished in this ritual—or in the actual state of our information—is compensated for by the rich symbolism of the post, in which we sought to identify a triple condensation: of the Vedic yūpa; of the śamī, as closely linked to the production

[169]But one may bear in mind the muffled appeal of the queen during the night of the putting to death of the sacrificial horse in the aśvamedha: she addresses the slain horse that would unite with her with the words "*ambe ambīke 'mbālike*"; see above, p. 176.

of the Vedic sacrificial fire; and of the buffalo as both king of the asuras in the myth and as the goddess's sacrificial victim in the ritual. Insofar as we can indeed see in the pipal-neem couple a substitute for the Vedic pipal-śamī couple, where the pipal is the male element and the śamī its female counterpart, Pōtu Rāju, while being fashioned of śamī, can only—as the male buffalo, the demon-turned-devotee, and the goddess's little brother—be closely linked to the pipal, which is a tree with milky sap. This entire analysis is, of course, made on the basis of observed facts and texts of Vedic ritual, and derives almost nothing from the consciousness of the actual participants in these goddess cults. The historical relays upon which we have relied have above all come from the epics. As to archaeology, it gives us at least two exact lithic reproductions of Pōtu Rāju's form: the relief on the gopuram of the Liṅgarāja temple at Bhubaneswar (tenth-eleventh centuries; above, p. 59); and a post dedicated to Munnaḍiyāṉ sculpted in the round at Uttaramērūr (above, p. 120). Little enough. Perhaps other discoveries are reserved for the future, since until now there have been few reasons to notice this particular form of post. However, since our foray into Āndhra ritual, we have noted that the presence of the god-post-Buffalo before the protective goddess of the village supposed not only a conception of the goddess as victorious over the Buffalo demon, but also the transformation that had submitted the Vedic sacrifice to the treatment of the epic war. One hardly dares to evoke a distant relationship of the buffalo sacrifice with the aśvamedha.

i. Center-Periphery Dialectics

Now the dialectic of the center and the boundary is confirmed not only by the facts collected in the Kāverī basin but by those found in Kongunad. Despite the amplitude of the transformations, the basic formula remains the same—and this was the question we raised while approaching Māriyammaṉ. The center-boundary relation is so fundamental that it can reproduce itself in a purely symbolic manner onto the terrain, as for example when one sees Māriyammaṉ and Ellaiyammaṉ associated in the same sanctuary at Puttūr (above, pp. 121-22) and Nāgapaṭṭiṉam (above, pp. 124-25), the effigy reduced to a head always representing Ellaiyammaṉ, goddess of the boundary; or again, as in Civaṉmalai (above, pp. 170-71), a site organized with the superior god linked to the mountain, a Māriyammaṉ temple oriented toward the east like the god, and a boundary Kālī temple open to the north, the whole in an area of a few hundred square meters and on the margin of the real settlement. In effect, it seems that to account for such topographic anomalies, it does not suffice to speak of a displacement of the settlement. There have indeed been displacements in certain cases, and one can even collect incontestable evidence for them, but basically the symbolic importance has always held precedence over the actual localization.[170]

The identity of the formula affirms itself in particular by the presence of the post as an element at the temple of the center, the latter always being consecrated to Māriyammaṉ. From this structural point of view, there is indeed a passage from the Pōtu

[170]I leave aside from this synthesis the posts in Ramnad, for which I lack sufficient information, mainly because of the cult's degraded condition or total interruption there. But their study could perhaps be resumed.

Rāju at the center of the Āndhra village to the impalement stake with hooks of Tanjavur, whose form, if one takes into account its cruciform section, can also distantly evoke that of Pōtu Rāju. Likewise, there is a passage from the central Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra to the three-pronged post temporarily created for the Māriyamman festival in Kongunad, but relayed by a permanent post that it replaces when it is a matter of a small Karuppu embedded in the ground, or that it doubles in the case of a large smooth post with the most colorless name: Tūṇaicāmi, the "post-god," or *māriyammaṉuḍaiya kambam*, the "post of Māriyamman." Moreover, the specific form of Pōtu Rāju seems to be forgotten at the same time as the buffalo sacrifice, which is never addressed to Māriyamman and which, when it reappears in Kongunad, is relegated to the boundary and the Kālī temple that guards the boundary.

Besides, the buffalo sacrifice has perhaps never been practiced in the localities chosen for study along the Kāverī, no more at the boundary than at the center. Yet to say that it has completely disappeared from the mythico-ritual complex would be for the present premature—as would the contrary assertion. Everywhere, even when the iconographic theme of the severed head disappears—as it has at least from Māriyamman temples on the banks of the Kāverī—Māriyamman remains identical with Reṇukā, even beyond any explicit reference to the latter. Her sanctuary accommodates representations of Kāttavarāyan and Karuppu, the former having at least two Brahman wives: the one he abducted, Āryāmālā, for which act he merited impalement, and the other—Karuppāyi or Karuppalagi—the wife who could indicate his relationship to Karuppu (are the two brothers-in-law?). The mythic and ritual variants give greater prominence to Kāttavarāyan, and we have already said why one must recognize beneath this demon the Arjuna Kārtavīrya of epic myth, the king who wants to possess the cow belonging to the Brahman Jamadagni, Reṇukā's husband, and kills him to achieve his ends. If it is not he, it is his sons who execute the Brahman for the same reason, unleashing in any case the bloody reprisal of Rāma Jāmadagnya. The identity of Karuppu, who is eventually master of the impalement stake and thus also associated with this variant of the post, remains unclear. One thus retains above all that he is in this region inseparable from Kāttavarāyan.

ii. Tanjavur/Kongunad

In Kongunad, however, Kāttavarāyan completely disappears, while Māriyamman-Kālī grapples with two husbands, one as calamitous as the other. When one rediscovers Jamadagni in the pūcaṭṭi on the one hand and in Muniyappan on the other, we are certain not to have left the epic myth of Reṇukā. Yet Māriyamman is married for the period of her festival to a post, possibly linked or identified with Karuppu (Cennimalai, Kannapuram [Beck]), whose ritual allows one to affirm that he is on intimate terms with water. The Kālī temple can include a small open-air shrine to Karuppu sheltered beneath a tree with milky sap. Pirātti Amman also has one. Now the temporary post installed during the Māriyamman festival, which represents her husband, is always hewn from a tree with milky sap, generally a *Ficus* (Beck: *Euphorbia tirucalli,* which seems inappropriate for this use because of its small dimensions and its ligneous parts). There is no reason to think that Kāttavarāyan would be behind this post, but one notices that

at least one epic trait connects him with Karuppu: his association with marshes.[171] Furthermore, the "marriage" of Māriyamman and Karuppu, the Black One, during the ritual calls to mind that Kongunad borders on Karṇāṭaka, where one finds the myth of the young Brahman woman seduced by a husband who eats buffalo meat. She becomes the goddess, while her husband is reborn as a buffalo to be offered to her in sacrifice. All of this suggests that Karuppu, and a fortiori the wooden post, could be a form of the Buffalo, but we shall speak of this later and, for the time being, retain this connection as an hypothesis; his name does not, in effect, appear in the Karṇāṭaka myth.

In Tanjavur, on the other hand, the goddess(es) of the boundaries, one or more Piḍāris, as well as Aiyaṉār, are associated with the worship of Māriyamman, or even have their festival at the same time. It is thus the group of guardian deities of the village that is worshipped by the local collectivity, leaving us assured of the structural unity of the center-boundary schema. The sacrifice of one or more goats and cocks does not assume a very large place, and, in any case, Māriyamman does not appear to receive meat even when an animal is immolated. It is another element of the cult that attracts attention: the firewalk, most often associated with one or another form of what is generally called hook-swinging (needles, hooks beneath the skin, even in the absence of a pole), or even replaced by it (above, pp. 130-31, among the Kaḷḷars.).[172] The firewalk is important not only as a penance accomplished by devotees, but because the goddess in the form of a pot carried by her priest is the first to cross the embers. It is thus first of all an ordeal for the deity, and her devotees only imitate her. Hook-swinging rites assume their meaning only as complements to this firewalk, resuming the vertical element of the post-impalement stake, from which the firewalk removes the implicit fiery element (which one finds in the post only in Andhra).

The firewalk conceived of as an ordeal of the goddess, that of the fire of war in which all the Kṣatriyas on Earth perish (we are in the Reṇukā myth), in fact facilitates the passage to the Kongunad ritual and prepares one to understand the pūcaṭṭi rite, in which the priest possessed by the goddess really suffers to signify the tortures brought upon her by her Brahman husband with warrior tendencies and the disruption of the entire sociocosmic order signified by this marriage. In the classical myth, the decapitation of the princess by her son at his father's command prefigures the total destruction of the kṣatra carried out by the same son to avenge his dead father. The princess should have a royal husband, not a Brahman and ascetic one, and if she is a figure of the Earth, the latter cannot live without Kṣatriyas to govern her. In this sense, the ritual preserves a profound knowledge of the myth that no modern Indian exegete would be able to express in words. But at the same time, it takes on such amplitude that

[171]Nonetheless, if Kāttavarāyan's capital is the epic Māhismatī, the latter evokes the name of the Buffalo, or of one who possesses the principal queen. But the site identified with Māhismatī on the banks of the Narmadā was never marshy. Since the epic, therefore, there has been a purely mythical and structural necessity to make Kārtavīrya a king of the marshy zones—*anūpa*.

[172]We shall not speak again of the procession on the tēr, which is not specific to the goddess except when she covers the entire locality rather than follow the symbolic quadrilateral of the rathavīthi. But the procession signifies nothing less than the deity's final triumph over the recurrent assaults of the demons, notably after the firewalk, which evokes the traversal of war.

one cannot grasp the structural homology that exists between the cult in Tanjavur and that in Kongunad. Nevertheless, what first reveals this expansion of the ritual process is the permanence of the relationship between the goddess at the center and the goddess at the boundary, between Māriyamman̲ and one or another form of Kālī. The complementarity is at first glance already striking, even when the dates do not coincide, for the simple fact that Māriyamman̲ retains her post when a buffalo sacrifice reappears, but in front of a Kālī at the boundary. Moreover, in the Dhārāpuram region, this sacrifice makes use of a post whose form seems to be derived from Pōtu Rāju, while the kampam of Māriyamman̲ is from this point of view atypical. Māriyamman̲ is still and always Reṇukā, but Kālī is only another of her forms, doubtless inferior, but obviously one that complements on the margins of the locale what could never, according to its most ancient codification, exist at the settlement's center: a precinct intended for the immolation of animal victims. The complementarity that is thus introduced between the two goddesses and the two rituals aims at reproducing on either side the moments of a single process. On the one hand, the symbolic significance is accentuated at the center: the burning husband, the post-husband fond of water. On the other, at the periphery one finds the sanguinary reality: multiplication of animal victims, bloodbath, and the buffalo sacrifice.

iii. Transformations and Emplacements

Now that the permanence of the structure of local cults to the goddess has been noted, the attempt can be made, based in particular on the facts gathered in Kongunad, to understand somewhat better the series of transformations that made the passage possible from the solemn Vedic sacrifice to the cult of the Goddess as slayer of the Buffalo. In Āndhra, we could only implicitly refer to the *Devī-māhātmya,* which, in a manner general for all of south India, was found to be unknown at the places studied. But from now on, we possess two supplementary landmarks in a chain of transformations, one of which, the obligatory passage by way of the MBh, has already been postulated (above, p. 97). The preservation—or reappearance—of aśvamedha segments and elements in the rituals of goddesses must not, in fact, be dissociated from the localization of goddess temples on MBh sites. It is the epic that reworked the notion of sacrifice so that war could be the sacrifice proper to the warrior, and it made its own use of the horse sacrifice to achieve its ends (an aśvamedha ritual is performed in Book 14 of the MBh). Notably, it constructed the eighteen-day war on the canvas of two antagonistic aśvamedhas reduced to symbolic sequences (in which the somic victim accompanies the animal victim).[173] Horse sacrifices that could have taken place historically ultimately had less impact than this epic utilization of the royal sacrifice par excellence. Or perhaps, on the contrary, those who structured the local cults to the goddess drew the inspiration from the MBh that enabled them to adapt the Vedic ritual to their own possibilities.

[173]It is not the purpose of the present work to demonstrate this. For a still preliminary presentation of this theme, and one subject to revision, cf. Biardeau 1977-78, 198-199, and above all 1985-86.

Let us first consider the contingency that gave the aśvamedha and the epic such particular value in the cult of the goddesses of this small region in Kongunad that drew our attention in this study.[174]

We know nothing of what may have taken place at an early date in this small area, and we can make no supposition here that could not be made elsewhere. In particular, it would be vain to postulate an especially active royal presence. At the village level, in Kongunad as elsewhere, the only personage of royal rank is ultimately the goddess—as is signified precisely by her ephemeral appearance in the form of a mare, consort of the sacrificial horse. The distorted model is borrowed from the epic, which itself takes the greatest liberties with the normative texts. It is thus not only a matter of the model's "popular" degradation in the course of centuries. The alteration of the norm was certainly first the act of kings and their priests. What is most extraordinary is that all traces of this ritual would not have disappeared and that it emerges even in Kongunad in a recognizable form. Those responsible for this resurgence are probably the powerful landowning castes settled in the region, not excluding today's Kavuṇḍars (Veḷḷāḷas for the most part, but also Paḍaiyāṭcis). These castes, with strong links to the soil, all the more readily acknowledge the goddess's sovereignty since they are locally, for themselves and for others, the actual representatives of the royal function. Certainly, the official government is there and its presence is heavily felt, but its possible interference with the temples does not go so far as to pose itself as "sacrificer." The only "permanent representatives of kingship" are the local landowners, and it is probably their strongly asserted "dominance," including their ritual functions, that lent local sacrifices both their richness and their more clearly designed contours. Their source is the same as elsewhere: their "horse sacrifice" passes by way of the epic, which itself assumes a diffuse presence of Brahmans and of traditional culture. This conception of the progressive emplacement of the actual forms of cults totally dispenses with the notion of Sanskritization, upon which Srinivas set such high store among the Coorgs.[175] It supposes that the "ultimate" source is already there as the encompassing universe of brahmanical bhakti. The contingency of local fact remains, but what counts more in the last resort is the semantic import of each variant, and it is this that must be clarified. Rather than a local particularity, the Kongunad variant appears as an expansion favorable to the observation of elements too deeply buried elsewhere to lend themselves to examination, even should their presence be suspected.

iv. The Contribution of the Epic

The epic's contribution is still more essential than it appears, since the aśvamedha that is transformed into a cult of the goddess and spread over two points of the locality (the sacrificial area and the site of the victim's execution) chooses among epic models the princess Reṇukā, a Kṣatriya woman married to the ascetic Brahman Jamadagni and

[174]To the extent that one does not even suspect the presence of an aśvamedha motif or of the classical myth of Renukā there, one misses in the description of the Kannapuram Māriyamman festival (Beck 1981) the complement that would have been provided by the cult of Kālī.

[175]Srinivas 1965.

the mother of Rāma, the future Paraśurāma of the purāṇas and of the temples.[176] It is worth recalling that the Reṇukā-Jamadagni myth is integral to the epic (a little while ago, in fact, some wanted to make the epic a Bhārgava chronicle) and not a secondarily related myth any more than an *Ur-Mahābhārata*. It offers a kind of abridgement of the epic plot, but ends in catastrophe without the explicit intervention of the avatāra (Rāma Jāmadagnya is only a figure of the avatāra in the epic myth). The aśvamedha is even mentioned in one version of the story (MBh 12.49.64 [49.65]) and seems to be assimilated to the destruction of the Kṣatriyas that is repeated twenty-one times (the horse sacrifice includes twenty-one yūpas). The remarkable feature is obviously the princess's decapitation, followed by her resurrection, which symbolizes the calamity of the Earth that arises from the mixture of varṇas, and the end of this calamity—thus a crisis of dharma, of which the Earth is the great victim. We know that among later "popular" developments of the myth, the episode of the murdered goddess is counterbalanced by that of Jamadagni's cow, which produces as many warriors from her body as she needs to defend herself. But the theme of the warrior cow who takes the initiative in her defense and that of her Brahman master is already epical: it is Vasiṣṭha's cow, that of the pure Brahman without kṣatra mixture who refuses to defend himself against Viśvāmitra, the Kṣatriya who wants to become a Brahman (MBh 1.175 [165]; *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.53-56 [52-55]). And Viśvāmitra is Jamadagni's maternal uncle. The latter, after venting his symbolic anger toward his wife and having his son murder her, also refuses to defend himself against Kārtavīrya, recollecting that he is himself a Brahman.

Princess wife of a Brahman, warrior cow of a Brahman, such are the epic sources (absolute "origin" for me) of the double visage the Goddess will retain over the centuries. She presents in this way, as does the avatāra, a composite of the brahman and the kṣatra that makes her the defender of the superior values of brahmanical society. If she has a low-caste priest and if Brahmans keep themselves at a practical distance from her cult (without, however, ignoring it to the extent that they claim), it is because Kṣatriyas are absent. In Rājasthān, she has Brahman priests to officiate and Kṣatriya patrons to preside over her festivals. But the cult is then tantric in the precise sense of the term. The goddess receives oblations of blood and alcohol (which, moreover, conforms to what is said of the Goddess in the epic). In the south, in the absence of Kṣatriyas, the cult is only "popular," that is, local and presided over by the locally dominant caste or its representative. But a meat diet and the offering of alcohol are repugnant to the goddess, who leaves that to inferior and asuric deities. Where is dharma better conserved? Let us rather say that there are two formulae, each corresponding to a different social composition of upper castes. In both cases, blood flows in relation to the goddess. The tantric reversal of values in the north gives way in the south to an original exploitation of the theme of asceticism, which leads to the same result. There are munis who are pure Brahmans, such as Vasiṣṭha or Vyāsa, whose ascetic rigors, as powerful as they may be, do not endanger the world because they are the acts of true renouncers and are in the last resort placed at the service of the general order. Next to

[176]It will be remembered that Draupadī, the central princess in the epic, is practically monopolized by the Vanniyars in northern Tamilnadu.

them, there are many other ascetics with less pure intentions whose superhuman power can burn the world to ashes. This is generally the case with the asuras in the avatāra myths. The myth of Jamadagni is more subtle; this Brahman has kṣatra blood through his princess mother and through the error in the ritual that governed his conception. In his turn, he strengthens this "mixture" by marrying a princess, and his marriage would then be only an act of common kāma were it not that it also enters a superior cosmic plane more englobing than the first. That suffices for Jamadagni's asceticism to be a danger for the Earth: Reṇukā is murdered. It is then that Kārtavīrya appears in the myth, the buffalo in the cult,[177] and eventually the two who are associated as Māriyamman̲'s guardians (Kāttavarāyan̲ and Kar̲uppu). But we cannot forget that Mahiṣa, the Buffalo king of the asuras, is known from the epic as the adversary of Skanda, nor that the Goddess sung of by Arjuna (MBh 6.23.8 [App. I, no. 1, line 15]) "loves buffalo blood."

One knows nothing of the concrete religion of the authors of the MBh or of their contemporaries, but it can be said without apprehension that the cult of the Goddess, such as it is found today in south Indian villages, could have derived everything from the epic, even should it be necessary to imagine a certain number of mediations.[178] For the epic establishes the socioreligious structure that will be dominant in India for centuries, at least on the normative plane. The borrowing from the Veda of the aśva-medha theme, which is found in the myth of Reṇukā, then as underlying the great battle, and finally as celebrated in Book 14, is only one, but not the least, of these unknown authors' extraordinary strokes of inspiration that were subsequently operative for centuries. We speak of inspiration, but were those authors ever aware of innovating? The entire aśvamedha ritual bespeaks war, since the horse sacrifice must recognize the bounds of the yajamāna's sovereignty, and the immolation of the victorious horse (concerning which, it should be understood, we have no concrete information or precise directives in the texts) is the promise of prosperity for the kingdom, prosperity symbolized by the mock copulation between the queen and the dead horse. This queen, who is the *mahiṣī* of the king, his "principal wife" (but also the "she-buffalo"), becomes a mare when the victim—whom the myth and "popular" cult make her marry—becomes the buffalo *mahiṣa*. It can be assumed that this transformation took place during the time when the MBh was constructed. The buffalo figures neither in Vedic literature nor in the epic as the vehicle of Yama. This feature would thus be a consequence rather than a choice made at the outset.

[177]We have had occasion to mention the myth related to this buffalo in Karnātaka, because the cult connected with it introduces a Pot-rāj. Cf. above, pp. 24-25 and nn. 19 and 20. This personage, a man of low caste, is one who is "possessed" by the Buffalo, and after the buffalo are immolated, he drinks the blood of a lamb whose throat he tears open with his teeth. He has been relegated to the margins of this study, as was the Pot-rāj of Mahārāstra, essentially because any form of post has disappeared from this cult, but also because the known structure is not seen to stand out clearly. B. Stein's delimitation of south India as a macroregion retains its validity here: we are already in the Deccan.

[178]One could, of course, say the opposite and suppose that the MBh was able to absorb material earlier than and/or external to brahmanism (one can no more deny this than prove it). That would not preclude that goddess cults would have made explicit or implicit reference to epic myth and ideology. One would thus gratuitously posit a supplementary stage without any gain in intelligibility.

It would perhaps be possible to reduce this contingency of mythic and ritual choices to an important point, which concerns as well the more or less intelligible forms of Reṇukā as Paccaivāl̲iyamman̲ and her elusive association with an anthropomorphic Śiva (below, pp. 275 ff.). The question posed constantly around Māriyamman̲, which has never received a univocal response from the varied informants, is that of the goddess's stage of life. Is she a virgin? Is she married? The reference to the classical myth makes it possible to note that she was married, indeed widowed, but that at the same time she comports herself as Viṣṇu's virgin sister, or as the woman warrior of the gods in the DM. There is nothing surprising here, since it is indeed the same goddess who appears now in the form of a fierce virgin, now as Śiva's consort. She has no linear biography, but she is sometimes one, sometimes the other according to need, and sometimes both. It is the necessity of the annual festival that decides, and this involves a certain ambiguity. Above all in Kongunad, Māriyamman̲-Reṇukā is primarily a victim, victim of her Brahman husband as of her royal asuric suitor. But she triumphs over both of them, which is confirmed by the festival of her alter ego Kālī with its buffalo sacrifice. For in the cult of the virgin Kālī, the ambiguity is the same.

The queen protectress of the village steals a lead over the sacrificial princess. The Earth, after the storm of disorder, brings back peace, as the putting to death of the buffalo confirms. In the real sacrifice of the animal she is no longer the victim, nor just the queen or goddess as the buffalo's addressee; she is the true sacrificer for whom the chief of the village is only the representative. Or rather she is the "patroness," whom she can be only as the wife of a sacrificial patron, of a king. The village headman would then be the substitute for the king, who is absent, as he must be: what would one make of a sanguinary Brahman or an asuric king in a sacrifice intended to restore the order of the world? The sign that he is there without being there is precisely the form of the mare in which the goddess temporarily appears. The principal wife—the mahiṣī—must, in the horse sacrifice, spend the night with the victim-horse, the substitute for the king intended to impregnate her. Her husband is dead because he was a bad king. The queen-mare thus evokes the royal status of her husband and plays the role of sacrificer with him. The couple is mandatory, and one must act "as if." Whence arises the possibility of a "marriage," even a bloody one, during the festival of Kālī (above, pp. 162-63), who in any case is considered to be married. The warrior queen is a virgin; the sacrificer-queen is married. In this complex sacrifice, she must be both wife and virgin. This is not extraordinary for a mythical personage who has a particular quality only in relation to her context.

If we admit to being unable to further align the three large families of variants that we have examined—the grāmadevatās of Āndhra, the Māriyammaṉs of the lower Kāverī delta, and the Māriyammaṉs with their Kālīs in Kongunad—we have at least ascertained that a simply diffusionist schema based on the complex post of Āndhra would not suffice to explain them. Brahmanical knowledge of society and its religion circulates in each region, and its epic translation for the use of kings was not only a decisive moment in the theoretical passage from Veda to the religion of bhakti, but also the privileged instrument for the communication of this knowledge. The Brahmans who worked toward the generalization of the notion of sacrifice and toward the "secularization" of renunciation were heard. Kings were no doubt their first listeners, but they were not the

only ones, from which one better understands the pleiad of MBhs in vernacular languages, translations, or local recastings of one of the epic's classical versions. Conversely, it is impossible to deny that something would have passed from one regional variant to another, in this instance the *form* of the post, since that is what I have chosen to trace. The series of transformations thus has two dimensions: in time, starting from the epic source or its cultic concomitants; and in space, around a central element of the sacrifice, which was surcharged with significations in the same measure as one turned away from the Vedic ritual.

But we have not finished identifying all the derived forms of Pōtu Rāju. If goddess cults claim the participation of the quasi totality of local collectivities, they remain under the direct control of the locally dominant landowning caste. In pushing the investigation toward the south, where the practice of buffalo sacrifice becomes scarce, one sees the animal reappear in its symbolic form of the post outside of the grand ritual ensembles in which it has figured up to now. Its status as asuric king, as inferior and impure god, will be increasingly affirmed, while its link to the goddess will appear to become weaker.

C. Māḍaṉ and His Congeners

The transformations that we will now consider, more or less at random, involve a shift in space; for now, the inquiry centers exclusively on the district of Tirunelveli in the far south of Tamilnadu, and thus of the Indian peninsula. This dry and flat countryside, vitalized solely by the vegetation of the rich valley of the Tambraparṇī River, with the range of the Ghats standing out in the west, is literally strewn with little sanctuaries. These can be comprised of one or several *pīḍam*s (Tamil *pīṭam* < Sanskrit *pīṭha,* "seat, socle") in the form of truncated pyramids surmounted by a kind of knob, or also of anthropomorphic statues put there as if by chance, although each would have a history. It appears that we are outside the area where buffalo sacrifices have been very prevalent. But they are not absent, and the one that is still performed today provides a wealth of information, above all if we are guided by the elements of myth, rites, or iconography that we have discovered elsewhere. These elements can also help us at the same time to partially reduce the contingency and diversity of the representations—essentially those of the *pēy,* or inferior deities—who subordinate themselves here first of all to Aiyaṉār-Śāstā, but also to local goddesses, and perhaps to the former by the latter's mediation.

Since our connecting thread remains as always the very precise form of the post-god of Āndhra, one may think that the association with a goddess and with this form, in one manner or another, already constitutes a reason to see in such little gods and their pīḍams one of the ultimate deformations of the symbolic complex from which we set out—thus again, another distant and hardly recognizable echo, perfectly unconscious besides, of the Vedic sacrifice and its ritual. The incursion into the Tamil countryside has brought out the symbolic richness of the vaṉṉimaram (above, pp. 115 ff.), whose palette we are far from having exhausted. One must recall it as an additional reference point. Moreover, what was true for epic India (above, pp. 95-96) remains vested in the heart of south India: the buffalo is first of all a wild forest-dwelling animal that must be

hunted and captured for it to be sacrificed to the Goddess, above all in royal sport. This is illustrated, for example, in the history of Veḷḷāḷa Āranāyakka Mudali as related by Nelson (1868, Part III, pp. 90 ff.). He was an officer in the army of the Nāyakkars of Madurai who could have become king had his guru not dissuaded him because he was not a Kṣatriya. Born into a poor family from Kāñcipuram, he seems to have been destined for great things from the day when he was found sheltered by an open-hooded cobra. He enters the service of a king, gives proof of his remarkable gift for mathematics (a Brahman trait), but also for the royal sport of buffalo hunting: he shows how to sever the buffalo's head with a single stroke. For it was customary for the king to go hunting each year to capture a wild buffalo and then decapitate it before the Goddess. Let us add that the fiction here remains near to the reality, since there are still wild buffalo today in the Western Ghats. The sacrificial buffalo can thus rightfully be considered as a substitute for its counterpart in the mountain, for which no king any longer goes hunting.

1. The Buffalo Sacrifice in Gangaikondam[179]

In this village as everywhere else in India, the buffalo sacrifice has been banned. One day when the legislation was new, the collector of the district wanted to implement it. But this happened to be one of the places in Tamilnadu renowned for its buffalo sacrifices. The goddess Aiyirattanman, who received these buffalo, sought out the collector, whose wife was just then pregnant. The goddess announced that the wife would give birth to a girl who would die if she was not given the goddess's name. As the labor had been difficult, the collector deemed it prudent to authorize the sacrifice, and ensured its perpetuation in due form on a copper plate. For this reason the sacrifice continues here, while at Pāḷaiyamkōṭṭai the same goddess is deprived of it.

The Aiyirattamman temple, common to the entire village but situated outside the settlement to the east, faces north (as do all goddess temples in this region), where a little tributary to the Tambraparṇī flows by. It is apparently equivalent to the boundary temples to goddesses found in Āndhra, although the notion of grāmadevatā appears to be unknown in the Tamil countryside.[180] The priest is a Kampār (a caste of musician-priests), while the administration of the temple reverts to the *kaṇakku-piḷḷai*, the village accountant. The possessed man is a Ceṭṭiyar (here a low caste, probably an oil-presser). The goddess's festival is celebrated every year on a Tuesday in Aippaci (October-November), that is, after Navarātri. In the afternoon, the possessed man goes with a pot representing the goddess to the *agrahāram,* the Brahman quarter, first to the temple of Viṣṇu-Perumāḷ, then to that of Śiva, to announce the festival and obtain the delegations necessary for its celebration. That night, a meal consisting of meat is offered to the

[179]All the material concerning section C devoted to Tirunelveli has been drawn either, for the Mādans, from Reiniche 1979, or from M.-L. Reiniche's field notes, communicated to me orally or by letter. In two instances, the author notes in her book the possibility of assimilating Mādan and Mahiṣāsura (151 n. 3; 217 n. 40). I thus only pick up her hypothesis.

[180]The *Tamil Lexicon* gives *kirāma-dēvati*, "Tutelary deity of a village." Cf. above p. 135, notably where the expression is applied to all the protective deities of the locality.

goddess, and the blood sacrifice takes place. The accountant must offer the first goat. Here, we find a feature common to the "village" sacrifices in Āndhra: the accountant is here the local representative of power, but his goat is offered on behalf of the entire community. Subsequent offerings will be of an individual and votive nature. The sacrificer is always a Maṟavar.

But every three years this simple festival is replaced by what is called in this region a *koḍai* (*koṭai*),[181] which brings together the inhabitants of seven villages around the Aiyirattamman temple and culminates in the sacrifice of a buffalo. Eight days prior to the date fixed for the festival, the possessed Ceṭṭiyar, bearing on his head a pot containing water from the river and previously venerated by a dīpārādhanā, proceeds to the agrahāram in Gangaikondam following the same route as for the annual festival, visiting all the streets. After a visit to the Śiva temple, he deposits the pot at the temple of Muppiḍāri Amman, goddess of the Piḷḷais, the landowning caste to which the accountant belongs. The Muppiḍāri temple is located near the chariot of the Śiva temple, at the heart of the settled area. There a pūjā is offered to the pot, which will be taken that night to the Aiyirattamman temple. During the week separating this rite from the festival, the possessed man, subject to strict observances, goes to invite participants from the other villages. A few days before the festival, the accountant must choose a buffalo from among all those that have been offered in consequence of a vow (there can be as many as a hundred). The one he chooses will be sacrificed and the others sold to the profit of the temple. The sacrificial buffalo is decorated and otherwise prepared, and a Maṟavar leads it around the villages that have been invited to participate.

The festival begins on Monday evening in the presence of the inhabitants of Gangaikondam only, each of whom has had to provide a little rice flour for the *mākkāppu* rite.[182] On this evening, the goddess is covered with rice flour dough, the visible result of which is to render the renowned black goddess white. On Tuesday morning, those who are possessed by the goddesses of all the participating villages arrive, each bearing the pot of their goddess, who is of course Aiyirattamman's younger sister, at least for the occasion. An Aiyar Brahman is summoned to perform a kumbha-abhiṣeka, and then at midday a pūjā takes place. Decoration of the chariots and other preparations for the goddess's procession begin at six in the evening. When these have been completed, the sacrificial buffalo returns from its tour of the villages and its Maṟavar guide leads it to the Aiyirattamman temple. The goddess then passes through the village on her chariot, visiting along the way the Śiva and Muppiḍāri temples, the Piḷḷai streets, and so on. When the procession ends at midnight, a meal of cooked meat is offered to the goddess and to Suḍalai Māḍan (a little pīḍam), who is found outside her sanctuary on the same raised platform, but to the goddess's right and not facing her. A hole has been dug at the bottom of the steps that lead to the sanctuary, on the axis of the main door. The buffalo is positioned at the edge of the hole, facing the goddess, and a Maṟavar sacrificer severs its head in such a manner that it falls into the hole. The body is then pushed into the same hole, which is filled in and covered with stones (plate 89). The Maṟavar

[181]On the notion of the *kotai*, see Reiniche 1979, 147 ff., and annexes 2-3 in idem, 241-47.
[182]On the different meanings of *mākkāppu*, cf. Reiniche 1979, 161-62.

then goes to take a bath, after which the accountant—who by rule presides over the ceremony—ties a new garment around his body. Then he begins "to dance Suḍalai Māḍaṉ," according to the Tamil expression. After the Maṟavar's dance, and following a meal of cooked rice, a black goat offered by the accountant is sacrificed to Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. Following a pūjā, those who become possessed dance and the musicians sing the story of Aiyirattammaṉ, slayer of the demon Makiḍāsuraṉ. At daybreak, the possessed return to their respective villages and the Ceṭṭiyar again takes his pot to the Muppiḍāri temple in the Piḷḷai quarter. All offerings made to Māḍaṉ, beginning with the black goat, go to the Maṟavar executioner.

From this brief description of the koḍai, let us first take note of the name of the goddess associated with the buffalo sacrifice: Aiyirattammaṉ calls to mind Āryāmālā, the Brahman girl abducted by Kāttavarāyaṉ, but it is also a feminine form corresponding to Aiyaṉār (<Skt. *ārya*). In the *Harivaṃśa,* the hymn to the goddess is called *Āryā-stava* (II 3 [App. I, n. 8). The goddess in question is thus one who, although she eats meat and is fond of buffalo, is of elevated status, a warrior rather than a Brahman, since she does battle with Mahiṣa and eats meat; however, the layer of dough she received on the previous day could serve to "brahmanize" her, or locate her on the pure side of the pantheon. To be sure, the white dough removes her terrible aspect, but at the very moment when there is a sacrifice that commemorates her combat—perhaps to recall the sanctity of her cause, which would be the best protection.[183] Her whiteness and her name may be veiled evocations of the theme expressed mythically in Karṇāṭaka of the young Brahman woman married to a man of low caste, or of the myth of Kārtavīrya and the Brahman's cow he seizes.

In front of her temple—and perhaps implicitly in the position of a subordinate husband,[184] although that is not at all suggested—is found Suḍalai Māḍaṉ (one of the principal Māḍaṉs; see below). The latter has two remarkable features: he is associated with the buffalo sacrifice in such a way that it is for once possible to clearly distinguish the victim offered to the goddess, the buffalo, from the black goat intended for him, Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. Here one finds a response to a question raised concerning Pōtu Rāju in connection with the observation that the buffalo sacrifice was framed between goat sacrifices. Let us say that, at most, the present example makes the hypothesis of a distinction plausible, but it is impossible to draw a conclusion from the one instance to the other. All the more so since a relationship, not to speak of identity, between Māḍaṉ and Pōtu Rāju is yet to be proved, and this point cannot be rigorously demonstrated.

The second striking feature is Māḍaṉ's rapport with the Maṟavar executioner, a relationship that reaches the point of identity in the possessed dance. Throughout Tirunelveli and perhaps beyond it, Maṟavars have and claim responsibility for the role of sacrificer. It would be wrong to view in this an indication of low status, as in Āndhra, where the buffalo's executioner normally belongs to a particularly denigrated caste that eats buffalo meat. Here, the sacrifice and the consumption of meat are in no

[183]In the MBh, Arjuna has a black complexion and white hair. Arjuna signifies "white," but he also bears the name Krsna, "black."

[184]See above, pp. 117 ff., regarding Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ, Śiva, and Agnivīra. Agnivīra has a position entirely comparable to that of Sudalai Mādaṉ with respect to the goddess.

way connected, since the victim is buried in its entirety. It is more likely that the Maṟavar's privilege of severing the neck of the sacrificial animals belongs to his royal status, thus warrior and hunter, perhaps in imitation of what takes place in the Rājpūt kingdoms of north India. Besides, in this same region, the Maṟavars would sooner recognize themselves in Kaṟuppu than in Māḍaṉ. We shall thus for the present confine ourselves to adding to the Maṟavar file an item that could support the fragile hypothesis, put forward earlier, regarding the Maṟavars' unconscious recognition of their mythical ancestor in Mahiṣāsura (the demon converted into a devotee, of course).[185] Not far from Gangaikondam at Koḷumadai, there is a temple of Aiyaṉār-Śāstā (Ceṭṭai Śāstā or Ceṣṭanayiṉār Cāstā) that contains, amidst other little gods, a kind of pillar that does not have the current form of the pīḍam of the region, but rather evokes the post from which we began (see plate 88). It has on one of its sides an anthropomorphic relief painted brick-red, with a nimbus situated above the shoulders in such a way as to suggest as much Pōtu Rāju as the Tamil kaḷumaram. The nature of the available information concerning this pēy prompts some reflections: he is called Vaṉṉiyarāyaṉ, which in Sanskrit would give us Agni-rājā or Śamī-rājā. He is offered (or rather, was offered) votive terra-cotta bovines, while he was surrounded by small elephants and royal stone horses, not to mention nāgas and perhaps a dog. His name is connected with the Maṟavars, whom one also readily calls Vaṉṉis in the region (a subdivision of the Maṟavars being named Vaṉṉis). Vaṉṉis are the subject of stories that tell of their history of cattle thefts. In brief, one protects oneself against cattle-theft by the Maṟavar by offering a cult to their royal ancestor. But in the local or at least Tamil context, the vaṉṉi (Skt. śamī) and the buffalo are never far apart,[186] and the particular form of this Fire-king is another reason for comparison.

Apart from the problem of the mythical genealogy of the Maṟavars, and by extension of the Ramnad kings, the detour by way of Vaṉṉiyarāyaṉ has the advantage of revealing the familiar form in association with the vaṉṉi in a region where the buffalo demon is still known under the Tamilized name Makiḍāsuraṉ. Unlike Mahiṣa, however, this new pēy does not appear to be linked in any special way to the Goddess. On the other hand, the reappearance of the royal Vaṉṉi theme at a place where the Vaṉṉiyars are absent lends the variations on Agnivīra in eastern Tamilnadu a structural necessity that the diffusion of the *Mahābhārata* does not suffice to explain. Agnivīra, moreover, is never assimilated to Draupadī's brother and remains always on the side of the asuras. Conversely, the epic Agni-Dhṛṣṭadyumna assumes no role in the cult of the goddess: he is never represented or enacted. Curiously, at the Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ temple Agni appears only in the form of Agnivīra and the agnikaragam,[187] in the same way that Draupadī's Pōtta Rājā is completely dissociated from Agni. It would be a mistake to reverse the terms and say that the ritual presence of a popular form of Agni gave birth to the

[185]See above, pp. 25-26. But one must note that participants do not identify the Makiḍāsuraṉ of the myth with Suḍalai Māḍaṉ.

[186]Other instances of this proximity will be seen shortly.

[187]See above, pp. 117 ff. Sociologically, there is apparently no hierarchy between Vaṉṉiyars whose goddess is Draupadī and those who worship Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ; although the two goddesses' sanctuaries seem to be mutually exclusive at a given place, their respective devotees intermarry.

Draupadī cult; the diffusion of the MBh in south India is too ancient and too fundamental among the upper castes for us to be satisfied with such a feeble explanation. The passage from the Vedic god Agni, incarnated in the brother of the epic Draupadī, to the asura Agnivīra, would also be unexplainable. It is more worthwhile to note the co-occurrence (when this began is of little import), in the same social group of Vaṉṉiyars who worship Draupadī, of a cult for Agnivīra associated with the Goddess and the assertion of their status as Kṣatriyas of the lineage of Agni. The claim, obviously the tip of an iceberg, is confirmed by the Draupadī cult, where Fire appears symbolically only in the final ritual of the firewalk, in which the Vaṉṉiyars are "victims," and is restored to its real import—that of a very local and quite low status of sovereignty—in the personage of Agnivīra. Moreover, the presence of Pōtu Rāju before Draupadī, the eventual association of the goddess and her guardian with the specific form of the sacrificial post (at Kūttampākkam; above, p. 108), and the very name of the Vaṉṉiyars, enable us to discern separately, but within a single socioreligious complex, the elements of the post-god of Āndhra. Thus the ubiquity of the Vedic sacrifice is marked out on the backcloth, and it is now only what has become of the barely recognizable ramifications that hold together so many elements whose unity would be indiscernible at a superficial level of observation. The situation of the Maṟavars of Tirunelveli, and perhaps even of the kings of Ramnad, in relation to the vaṉṉi, Vaṉṉiyarāyaṉ, and the Buffalo would in turn be incomprehensible without a prior explanation of the Vaṉṉiyars' situation, since it reproduces an identical model without any of that model's elements having a clear conscious expression. Moreover, this time the link to the classical mythology is no longer made through the *Mahābhārata* but by way of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[188]

2. The Māḍaṉs

The Tirunelveli countryside can be characterized above all by its Māḍaṉs, who are usually represented by pīḍams (as described above). Our attention might not have been drawn to them had their pīḍams not sometimes taken the form of the post-god, which presents here a new variant. In fact, the side of the pīḍam to which worship is offered[189] is sometimes inlaid with a flat stone upon which a slender shaft ends in a kind of capital whose decorative aspect is more or less directly suggestive of the top of the lithic post on the Coromandel coast (plates 92, 93). Also like the post, this stone can itself portray in bas relief an anthropomorphic representation of a personage initially

[188]Dare we speculate on the name Guha given to the Maṟavars' ancestor, Rāma's boatman? Here again nothing is explicit, but Ramnad is not far from Tiruccendūr or Tiruparankuṉram (near Madurai), two large sanctuaries of Subrahmanya, who is known to have been born at least as much from Agni as from the seed of Śiva, and one of whose best-known names is precisely Guha. As for the MBh, it is still very much present in the large Krsna temples of the Tambraparṇī valley and, on a popular level, through Kāttavarāyaṉ, who counts among the pēys, though he is a little more lost in the mass than is the case elsewhere: from the impalement stake promised him as his torture farther north, one eventually finds him represented "enthroned" as the torture victim on a kaḻumaram (or *kaḻukampu*) (plates 90, 91). Note the hourglass drum, or the mortar, or again the casāla of the yūpa, that he holds in his hands, as if it had taken its place at the top of the post.

[189]In any case, a Mādaṉ festival involves a temporary anthropomorphic representation of the god affixed on the facade of the pīḍam, if the facade has only a smooth surface. Cf. Reiniche 1979, Pl. 6.2.

indistinguishable from numerous vīras (Tamil *vīraṉ*, "warrior") in the Tamil south: side chignon, knife held in the upraised right hand, left hand resting on a cekkumāndaḍi, a kind of club already noted to have been associated with Kaṟuppu (above, pp. 132-34, 138-43) and Kāttavarāyaṉ in Māriyammaṉ temples.[190] It is difficult to affirm that the stone set in a pīḍam suffices to identify the pīḍam as Māḍaṉ, all the more because he is not the only one of his species in the region. The examples found, however, appear to indicate that this would be so; one even finds two Māḍaṉs associated at the same site, both having the same inlaid stone with minor variants to distinguish them, and complemented by a Pēcciyammaṉ on a much lower pīḍam.

Although an asura, Māḍaṉ is no less a king. Also, when he is an anthropomorphic sculpture in the round, or in high relief on a stele, he bears a royal tiara rather than a side chignon, and the top of his stele once again evokes, as if it were a decorative motif, the upper knob of the stone post (plates 94, 95), permitting the passage from the pīḍam to the stele. He may further have a human form with a bovine head, but still bears a crown (plate 96). As the statue is generally sizable, it is possible to detail its features. Māḍaṉ is provided with two cekkumāndaḍis, one held in the air, the other inverted and with the left hand placed upon it. At the height of the waist and hips, he wears a three-stranded cord beneath which is placed a kind of short triangular dagger, while another cord falls sideways over the thighs and rises on the right side behind or in front of the shoulder. Of course, there all types of cords in Indian iconography, and we should not seek a special significance for these, were our attention not attracted by the form and theme of the yūpa. But here, how is one not to recall the three-stranded cord of grass on the sacrificial post and the cord that must tether the victim and bind it to the post? The comparison is all the more irresistible since the small dagger, placed beneath the three strands of the cord, or beneath one of them, could very well be a reproduction of the svaru, the chip of wood placed beneath the grass cord around the yūpa and serving as a mobile extension of the post (above, p. 35). Sacrificer-victim-post, the symbolic complex we have been following from the Vedic yūpa, thus reappears. One even has the (geographical?) intermediacy of Pōtta Rājā, whose painted wooden statue in the Pondicherry Draupadī temple bears a comparable dagger in the belt and a long sash pulled up on the left side, decorated with severed human heads (plate 40),[191] while his right hand holds a sacrificial weapon.

Māḍaṉ's name also catches our attention. To be sure, it is less transparent than Pōtu Rāju's. But there are good reasons to think of the Buffalo: *māṭaṉ* is the masculine of *māṭu*, which in Tamil designates any bovine, bull, ox, or buffalo, but also the cow or she-buffalo. One would thus have no grounds to choose the meaning "buffalo" for

[190]I have already remarked (p. 104) that the classical club—the *gadā*—very similar to the popular cekkumāndaḍi, reproduces the form of the post, upside down when it is propped on the ground.

[191]Some of these features, the three-stranded cord worn low, the long sash that reaches to the legs and is eventually transformed into a garland of skulls, the weapon (in the form of the royal sword), are found in Śaivite classical iconography, as well is in that of the goddess Kālī (not to speak of Viṣṇu's mace). We have already noted (above, p. 58 n. 2) that the problems raised with regard to the cults of lesser deities have classical parallels. It would, however, be difficult to conceive of popular art simply as an imitation or reproduction of the classical model. One need only consider the utilization by vīras of the svaru in the form of a dagger in the belt, which, if I am not mistaken, has hardly any equivalent in classical images.

Māḍaṉ[192] were it not for a place still well-known for buffalo sacrifices in the first half of this century named Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam, "the auspicious place for slaying buffalo." In this case one is left without a choice as to which bovine *māḍu* signifies: it can only be the buffalo. In current language, a māḍaṉ is very similar to a pōtturāsā (above, p. 103 n. 2): an oaf, ignorant and stupid; and this insulting epithet probably also applies to the buffalo, an animal slower and more ponderous than the ox. It is thus legitimate to assume that Māḍaṉ is a buffalo rather than any other bovine. Only on the basis of this choice can we also note the eventual representation of Māḍaṉ with a bovine head in his sanctuaries, and recall that the goddess Jyeṣṭhā (= Alakṣmī) is generally flanked on her right by a son (?) with a bovine head (plate 97). Would this bovine not be both here and there a buffalo, the Buffalo; and would his presence in goddess sanctuaries not be connected first to his association with Śāstā, the sovereign god of this region as the renowned son of Hari and Hara, that is, of Viṣṇu and Śiva?

Henceforth I will rely heavily, and not without certain leanings, on material gathered by M.-L. Reiniche (1979). An intra-Indian comparative perspective substitutes for the monographic concern, one globality thus pursuing another and bringing out the same facts in a different light. Is it surprising that they largely agree? Of the numerous māḍaṉs belonging to different lineages, castes, and quarters, let us consider only two whose origin myths are well delineated and extend beyond their having been adopted as the god of a given lineage or a particular local group.[193] In addition, Taḷavāy Māḍaṉ and Suḍalai Māḍaṉ are respectively associated with the worship of two goddesses in the village of Mel Ceval, the subject of Reiniche's monograph, who themselves, at least implicitly, have links with each other.

The myth of Taḷavāy Māḍaṉ is a popular transformation of Dakṣa's sacrifice. King Takkaṉ (Dakṣa) wishes to have a child and, to that end, does tapas. Śiva eventually sends him a girl, Pārvatī herself. But when Dakṣa wishes to marry his daughter to a king, Śiva appears and takes her back. Her father then performs a sacrifice—yāga—and the heat of the fire (that of his anger) disturbs Śiva and Pārvatī on Mount Kailāsa.[194] From his sweat, Śiva creates a son (*vērvai-puttiraṉ*) and sends him to destroy Dakṣa's sacrifice. The son (the Vīrabhadra of purāṇic myth) severs Dakṣa's head and replaces it with that of a māḍu (in place of the ram's head of classical iconography). It is therefore not surprising to find Taḷavāy Māḍaṉ beside Śāstā in his temple in Pranceri (not far from Mel Ceval). Śāstā is also locally called Vīryaperumāḷ, which is also a name of Vīrabhadra in this region (a Vīrabhadra flanked by a small Dakṣa with a ram's head, in the purer classical tradition). There is even an Aiyaṉār temple at Taṉicceyam (Madurai Dt.) that has a subshrine dedicated to Vīryaperumāḷ who is represented in the

[192]Above all, if one relies on the *Tamil Lexicon,* which gives for *māṭu* the single translation "ox." Mousset and Dupuis' *Dictionnaire tamoul-français* gives, on the contrary, all the possibilities mentioned above.

[193]I follow here the example of Reiniche 1979, 130 ff. for Taḷavāy Māḍaṉ, and 202 ff. for Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. While summarizing, I closely follow her analysis of myths that she drew from texts sung by professional singers.

[194]One knows that sacrifices of distant Vedic inspiration that are offered in large Hindu temples are called yāga and no longer yajña, as in the Vedic cult. Based on the Āgamas, they are addressed to the great deities of bhakti and normally do not include animal victims. They are done "for the well-being of the worlds," and not to satisfy a particular desire.

same manner. This is not the place to consider the problems posed by the god Aiyaṉār-Śāstā and the variants involved in passing from Tamilnadu to Kerala. But beginning with him, we can understand the two names of this Māṭaṉ who is at times Taḷavāy, at other times Karaiyaṭi: the first name makes him Śāstā's "general," which, while leaving Śāstā to his purity, puts Taḷavāy in charge of works of violence comprising both blood sacrifice (which he receives) and war, the epic transformation of sacrifice. In short, he is again one of those good demons who watch over the order of the world in place of their lord and master. But he is also Karaiyaṭi Māṭaṉ, the Māṭaṉ of the bank, recalling that Śāstā temples are frequently found at the base of the bank of a tank, where Māṭaṉ keeps him company.

Yet his relation to Śāstā hardly accounts for his generic name Māṭaṉ. Dakṣa, with his ram's or goat's head, symbolizes the Sacrifice in its Vedic form: a man with an animal's head, he condenses in a single image the patron of the sacrifice and the victim that he offers in his own stead. What could Māṭaṉ signify next to what would first appear to be the local equivalent of Vīrabhadra? In Mel Ceval he is also seen with his bovine head in the temple of Celliyammaṉ, goddess "of the northern gate," another boundary goddess whose temple belongs to the village. This time the name Taḷavāy Māṭaṉ assumes a new dimension: or indeed, it echoes that of Pōtu Rāju and the royal status of Mahiṣāsura, king of asuras; or indeed, having become the goddess's devotee, he is her guardian and the leader of her army. We should be wary of dismissing one meaning in favor of another, given the fundamental ambiguity of these demons who are very prone to caprice and quick to anger.[195] The subordination of Māṭaṉ to Śāstā could obscure a primary link to the goddess—logically prior, as integrated in the pan-Indian system before receiving supplementary local veneration.

But the configuration thus formed calls for a complement, for which Tāḷavāy Māṭaṉ's confrere, Suṭalai Māṭaṉ, the Māṭaṉ of the "cremation ground," must be introduced. The simple enunciation of the name Suṭalai suggests a lowering of status as compared to Taḷavāy Māṭaṉ. Before approaching his myth, and in order to dispense with a number of misleading interpretations, we must note that Suṭalai Māṭaṉ is present in the sanctuary of Aiyirattammaṉ, that he receives his portion at her triennial buffalo sacrifice, and that the Maṟavar sacrificer "dances him" at the sacrifice's conclusion (see above). We do not know, on the other hand, whether the Muppiṭāri Ammaṉ temple in Gangaikondam, at the center of the settlement and in the Piḷḷai quarter, also has a Suṭalai Māṭaṉ. One knows, however, that it is difficult to discern the extent to which a temple belonging to a locally dominant caste, one of whose members then presides over the buffalo sacrifice to Aiyirattammaṉ, would also be considered a village temple. The

[195]Here again, the link to Śāstā is a problem, one that becomes obscure when it is discovered that Śāstā (or Dharma-Śāstā), under the name Aiyappaṉ in his Śabarimalai myth, is confronted by a female buffalo-demon, Mahiṣī, thus presenting a reverse form of the Goddess in the *Devī-māhātmya* (cf. Pyyappan 1966, 14 ff.). It seems to me that this problem is only a particular instance of a question that can be formulated as follows: are the asuras altogether similar when the sovereign deity they confront is an avatāra of Viṣṇu or a son of Śiva (or like Aiyaṉār, a son of both Śiva and Viṣṇu)—or the Goddess? The question requires another: Does the avatāra of Viṣṇu and the son of Śiva (or avatāra of Śiva, of which there are countless over the landscape) maintain entirely the same type of rapport with the asura whom they combat?

situation in Mel Ceval is, on the contrary, clear (our information from Gangaikondam was, in fact, inadequate). To Celliyamman of the Northern Gate corresponds a Muppiḍāri at the center of the village, in the quarter of the Kōṉār herders. The Muppiḍāri temple, however, is unequivocally a village temple (Reiniche 1979, 24-25), while on the other side of the street a sanctuary of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ, whose devotees are especially Kōṉārs, is associated with it. The presence of a Suḍalai Māḍaṉ at the center of the settlement, and on the northern side (therefore within the quadrilateral) of the south car street of the Śiva temple, is perhaps not self-evident, since the recess accommodating him is ordinarily closed. The fact remains that he is there, surrounded by his devotees.

Although the myth of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ also begins with Dakṣa, Pārvatī's father, his story departs much more from the classical version, though without relinquishing the fundamental themes, as we shall see. During Śiva and Pārvatī's wedding, Śiva sees to it that Pārvatī's sweat falls into the marriage fire while they circumambulate it; had it fallen to the ground it would have destroyed the world. From this sweat the fire gives birth to Brahmaśakti, Pārvatī's double of terrible aspect and no doubt the female equivalent of the epic-purāṇic Brahmāstra. Brahmaśakti asks Śiva for a child, and he sends her to the underworld where the fire of the end of the world is found. There, Brahmaśakti receives in the fold of her garment a spark from the flame of the lamp at the thirty-second pillar (?), which she brings back as a shapeless mass, a *muṇṭam*: the term also means a "shaved head" and a "headless torso" (Skt. *muṇḍa* can also designate a tree from which the leafy crown has been cut, and which still subsists as a trunk)—a sacrificial theme if there ever was one. Pārvatī gets Śiva to transform the muṇḍam into a child, whom she nourishes with *amṛta* (ambrosia) in place of milk. The child prefers to go and devour a corpse that is being burnt at the cremation ground (*suṭalai*). This impure being must be exiled from heaven, and the child profits as he can from this to ask that he be offered blood in his cult on earth.[196] We shall omit the part of the account connected with the local form of the cult and its participants; this is the myth of the origin of the Kaṇiyārs, a caste of musician-dancers who come to offer some of their own blood in forms of substitution for human sacrifice.

Suḍalai Māḍaṉ's career on earth begins in Kāśī (the sacred city of Śiva, but also *the* funerary city). His journey leads him to Madurai, then to Tirunelveli, Kanyakumārī, and Kerala. Wherever he stops, he offers worship to the great gods, and notably to the goddess of the extreme south of India. In Kerala, he has a bone to pick with an untouchable magician and only extricates himself after afflicting a number of victims, among them the magician. Returning to Tirunelveli, he commits abominable crimes of which the main victims are the upper castes, and which have something of the final cataclysm of the world about them. Then he goes to seek the refuge of Corimuttu Aiyaṉ, the Śāstā of Corimuttu to whom all castes from Mel Ceval refer. The Corimuttu sanctuary is one of Śāstā's shrines in the Western Ghats, practically at the source of the Tambraparṇī,

[196]The theme of the *muṇḍam* permits not only a play on words Māḍaṉ/mūṇḍam, but a doubling of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ, who also becomes Suḍalai Muṇḍaṉ.

and the only one in the Ghats at which the god is not in the form of a yogin.[197] Oriented toward the east after having once faced west, the god is flanked by his two consorts and watches over the territory he rules, the limits of which are defined only by the provenance of the devotees who come to Corimuttu on pilgrimage, including the inhabitants of Mel Ceval. The sanctuary accommodates a number of inferior deities around Aiyaṉār. However, Suḍalai Māḍaṉ has committed too many infamies, and the god of Corimuttu does not accept him near him. Māḍaṉ therefore takes refuge in the most beautiful tree in the surrounding forest, a vaṉṉimaram, where his mother Brahmaśakti also resides surrounded by demons. But at Tiruccendūr, Subrahmaṇya asks that a pole be erected for him—a *koṭimaram*—to celebrate his victory over an asura. The carpenters set out and inevitably end up at the base of the vaṉṉimaram, which they want to fell. But Suḍalai Māḍaṉ intervenes and when they strike the trunk with an axe, they cut each other's legs. It is a veritable slaughter, and the carpenters seek asylum with Aiyaṉār, who counsels them to offer worship to Suḍalai Māḍaṉ, which they do. They fell the tree and there follows a long procession back to Tiruccendūr, which for Suḍalai Māḍaṉ is triumphal. He proclaims his worship by blood offerings, receives buffalo sacrifices, and, to crown everything, obtains Subrahmaṇya's benediction: the god authorizes Suḍalai Māḍaṉ's cult because he has the power to vanquish the wicked.

We set out from a recurrent form. This made it possible to venture an interpretation of a name, in which we rediscovered one that was associated with the form in Āndhra, and now to our surprise the myth also brings forth the post-god's material substance, namely the vaṉṉimaram. The latter provides the mediation needed by Māḍaṉ to gain recognition for his cult but also to transform him from the uncontrolled destroyer he was into a bastion against the wicked. The endorsement of his conversion comes from Subrahmaṇya himself, to whose sovereignty in the region even Aiyaṉār is subordinate. The narrative material, however, takes us far from Pōtu Rāju, scarcely touches on the theme of the buffalo sacrifice, and assigns the main roles to male gods, their hierarchic order being: Śiva, Subrahmaṇya, Corimuttu Aiyaṉ, and Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. Yet if we do not wish to minimize the presence and role of Brahmaśakti, born from the drops of Pārvatī's sweat that fell into the fire at her marriage to Śiva, we could evoke, beyond Pōtu Rāju, themes from classical mythology and the MBh itself, without at all forcing matters. It is, in fact, in Book 10 of the MBh, the *Sauptikaparvan*, that the night massacre of the Pāṇḍava camp takes place. The main agent of this epic transposition of a myth of the end of the world is the Brahman warrior Aśvatthāman, "possessed" by Rudra-Śiva.[198] While he gives himself over to the carnage, his terror-stricken victims see an entirely red Kālī who sings; she is Kālarātri, the Night of Time, the End of the World (MBh 10.8.69-70 [8.65]). The narrators of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ's bloody exploits have been directly inspired by this scene of horror. One sees the rushing of bhūtas, rākṣasas, and piśācas as they feast on the raw flesh of victims and dance inebriated with blood.

[197]Reiniche 1979, 129. But it is likely that this Corimuttu temple is itself subordinate to a mountain sanctuary where the god is a yogin.

[198]The epic text describes this possession with the verb *āviś*: "he penetrated into his body" (MBh 10.7.66 [7.64b-65a]). Today in north India the term āveś(a) is still the main term used to designate the "possession" of a man by a deity.

After this nightmarish night, Draupadī, mourning her brother and her five children, demands vengeance from Bhīma, who then seeks a confrontation with Aśvatthāman without thinking that the latter can use the Brahmāstra against him. It requires the prescience of Kṛṣṇa and the great self-mastery of Arjuna to avoid catastrophe. If one knows besides that Aśvatthāman's very name makes of him the kindling sticks of the sacrifice,[199] and that when Bhīma approaches him followed by Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, he is seated among *ṛṣis* and "anointed with clarified butter" (10.13.15 [13.14]), as are the araṇis when used to light the uttara-vedi fire to put to death an animal victim, one sees that the popular symbols are not so very far removed from the symbolism of the epic: the spark from the fire of the end of the world that creates Suḍalai Māḍaṉ has an affinity with the araṇis embodied by Aśvatthāman. The latter also has a Brahman mother from a warrior family, while Brahmaśakti is as much the calamitous mother as the weapon that sets fire to the world. Suḍalai Māḍaṉ and his mother remain tranquilly in the vaṉṉimaram—the śamī—so long as the carpenters do not attempt to fell the tree, just as the weapons of the Pāṇḍavas were given repose in the śamī for a year. Finally, is it surprising to observe that Book 10 concludes with a first version of the sacrifice of Dakṣa (10.18 [idem]) from which Dakṣa is absent, but to which Śiva is not invited.[200]

Thus, if we look behind the name of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ—who after all arises from a form of Śiva—we will be led to minimize the predominantly pejorative significance of the cremation ground and, on the contrary, to accentuate the funeral pyre, of which the conflagration at the end of the world is the cosmic transposition. Suḍalai Māḍaṉ, born of the fire at the end of the world, is capable of setting the world ablaze, and it is important that his power be controlled. During the festival, the man who possesses him dances with a burning torch that can be compared to the *pot* of the Mahārāṣṭrian Pot-rāj, and clearly indicates its rapport not only with fire but with the araṇis. In his south Indian periplus he did not fail to visit Kanyakumārī, the goddess who stands guard at the southern tip of India, and offer her his services, which also align him with Pōtu Rāju. Should we also recall that the epic śamī (MBh 4.5) in which the Pāṇḍavas conceal their weapons stands near a cremation ground, and that this indicates the deadly character for the world of the weapons concealed there, weapons related to war as fire to sacrifice? In short, if Suḍalai Māḍaṉ also frequents cremation grounds, it is above all to be true to his concept, no doubt just as in the case of Śiva.[201]

Rather than considering how Māḍaṉ cults are linked with those of Aiyaṉār—where one again finds the dichotomies vegetarian/carnivore, superior/inferior, renunciation/war for dharma, pan-Indian themes not at all specific to Tamilnadu—it seems more pertinent to find out if the cults of goddesses and Māḍaṉs are associated in such a way as to disclose a known structure where the Buffalo enters the picture. For the latter seems never to clearly appear in awareness. To give an example, it is uncertain if the account of the combat between Aiyirattammaṉ and Makiḍāsuraṉ (above, pp. 234-35) is to be

[199]Biardeau 1978-79, 154.

[200]This is a version of the myth still close to scriptural sources. Cf. ŚPB 1.7.3-4.

[201]I have considered the problem of Śiva's rapport with the funeral pyre in Biardeau 1981d, 167 ff. (= Biardeau 1971, 79 ff.), but more work is needed. There is in fact a great difference between Śiva and the Māḍaṉ, since the latter is impure by vocation.

seen as a Tamil version of the DM. In fact, the statue of Celliyamman at Mel Ceval, although seated, crushes with her foot a recumbent human form named Makiḍāsuran, but no one compares him with the buffalo demon, any more than with Taḷavāy Māḍan (Reiniche 1979, 151 and n. 3).

Notwithstanding the degraded condition of the double koḍai observed by M.-L. Reiniche in 1973 (1979, 153 ff.), it is indeed striking that Celliyamman of the Northern Gate and Muppiḍāri Amman of the Kōṉār quarter on the south car street, whose respective temples belong to the village, happen to be associated. The goddess as Śiva's consort within his Śiva temple is entirely disregarded, even though the festival could not take place without Śiva's sanction. The virgin goddess Celliyamman is the eldest of seven sisters, one of whom is Muppiḍāri. The latter reveals a triplicity that makes her no mere copy of Celliyamman: her name is interpreted as composed of *mu* < *munru*, "three," and when she is given a temporary effigy outside her sanctuary, it consists of three small clumps of earth that serve to support a pot. In brief, she would be the feminine equivalent of the Trimūrti, or more exactly the female form created by the gods of the Trimūrti to do battle with the buffalo demon in the DM. Should Celliyamman and Muppiḍāri be opposed, as renunciation is opposed to organized village life (Reiniche 1979, 151)? To be sure, Celliyamman is at the boundary, but this boundary, if we compare the goddess to her counterparts in Āndhra, rather calls to mind the eastern boundary of the vedi and the site of the sacrificial post, straddling the line that demarcates the interior and exterior of the sacrificial arena. In Āndhra, no permanent goddess at the center of the settlement corresponds to Muppiḍāri in Mel Ceval. There is, rather, a Pōtu Rāju alone beneath his pipal (or beneath a pipal and a neem). He is joined for the buffalo sacrifice by a temporary effigy of the goddess (or goddesses) of the boundary, and it is there at the village center, after a procession brings it from the boundary temple, that the victim is put to death. Comparing the two situations, we observe the emergence of two types of multiplicity. On the one hand there are the seven or eight virgin sisters, the eldest of whom, at the boundary, takes the lead by definition. The theme is present both at Mel Ceval and in Āndhra villages. Their number evokes the cardinal points, the oriented space of sacrifice and of organized life. The triplicity, on the other hand, returns one to the classical schema of the Goddess emanating from the male Trimūrti in connection with the battle with the buffalo.[202] M.-L. Reiniche has noted the distance that the landowning upper castes take with regard to the "village" rituals,[203] and this could be the "reason" for this Muppiḍāri—a popular

[202]One can see here a rapport with the triśūla, the weapon of both the Goddess and Śiva, with which either of them can be represented. It is thus tempting to see this same triplicity reemerge at the center of villages in Kongunad in the form of the post forked in three branches at the top that is installed in front of Māriyamman. In addition to its having a directly functional aspect in the cult, it would be an indication of the necessary role assumed by this post in the organization of the world. As one already knows, from Śiva to the Goddess there is more of the path to trace: Māriyamman's post belongs indeed to the same brood of necessary demons as Pōtu Rāju.

[203]At this point, the more exclusively sociological matter of the unity constituted by the village should perhaps be raised. Cf. Herrenschmidt 1981. But that is not the purpose of this work. M.-L. Reiniche provides in this regard the desired precision and nuance concerning certain castes' participation in or absence from these village festivals without making an issue of the notion of a cult unity at the village level. It can be held that

and unconscious resumption of a classical mythical theme in which the triplicity is subordinated to Muppiḍāri's being one of Celliyamman̲'s seven sisters. However that may be, there is no question, or any longer a question, of a buffalo sacrifice in their double koḍai, the triplicity of the goddess at the center being one of its symbolic resurgences. It is not certain whether the Celliyamman̲ festival's lack of splendor registers a loss of veneration, whereas Muppiḍāri is cherished by the Kōn̲ārs, in whose milieu both she and Suḍalai Māḍan̲ dwell. It is true that the Muppiḍāri festival seems to be monopolized by the Kōn̲ārs, who celebrate their Māḍan̲ at the same time. But as we just recalled, the buffalo sacrifice, as the culminating point of the grāmadevatā festival in Andhra, takes place at the center of the settlement, and not near her temple. In any case, the festival at Mel Ceval is doubled, and its celebration on two consecutive Tuesdays (in Vaikāci, May-June)—Tuesday being the goddess's favored day—indicates both the link between the two festivals and its distension. But Celliyamman̲ remains the eldest sister and, above all, her temple is the obligatory starting point for all *pāl-kūḍam* (milk pot) processions, which are integrated into all the koḍais of the goddesses of the quarters.[204]

To the extent that one can retain the grāmadevatā function of these two goddesses, their koḍai is of interest above all because we can see in it the place assumed by the two Māḍan̲s associated with their respective goddesses, and thereby indicate the real complementarity between the two divinities. For Celliyamman̲ as for Muppiḍāri, the most spectacular element is the goddess's procession on the chariot borrowed from the Śiva temple, which unexpectedly follows the same route as the Śiva procession itself, along the four streets of the temple-car festival, around the temple of the god and the old Brahman quarter. We must no doubt see in this identity of itineraries a loss of significance of the "goddess" function in the locality, and this is to be viewed in connection with the disinterest shown toward the festival on the part of a number of castes of high status, together with the disappearance (or the pure and simple absence) of any buffalo sacrifice. One rite is, however, noteworthy: prior to the procession proper, the goddess (one goddess after the other) is taken to the south of the village, to the juncture of three roads, where she attends a *matu-poṅkal* or *matu-māmicam,* which appears to be the substitute for a blood sacrifice (*māmicam* < Skt. *māṃsa,* "meat," and *matu* < Skt. *madhu,* "honey, fermented beverage," here from kaḷḷu or toddy, the local alcohol). A priest from the Vairāgi Paṇḍāram caste is required to perform the rite; he must fast for eight days and prepare the ritual ingredients himself. In the middle of the juncture, on a kōlam

the village is not first a territorial unity, the inhabitants of which find themselves mechanically incorporated into a collective worship, and at the same time maintain the notion of a unity of worship in which the village as such is the patron of the sacrifice; ipso facto, this implies that the village is first and foremost its inhabitants and not a given territory. Knowing the tensions that animate village life and the spatial mobility of certain groups, particularly castes not linked to the village by any land rights or which have members who have acquired land at different times, not to mention the fundamental repugnance felt by Brahmans and by those emulating them toward any blood sacrifice, one understands that the unity of the village could never present a perfect image in a given festival. Cf. below, p. 314.

[204]Reiniche 1979, 162 ff. This is a kind of substitute for the brahmanic upanayana, an initiation ritual for young people that they must perform before their marriage, on the occasion of a goddess's koḍai. The individual upanayana ceremony gives way to a collective rite.

that delimits the ritual area, the priest installs two pots filled with rice paste,[205] into which he introduces incense smoke and kaḷḷu. The resulting fermentation causes the contents of the pots to overflow and spread all around. Meanwhile, the musicians, who had remained silent while the smoke and alcohol were added to the ingredients, produce a great din. A pūjā is performed, and the procession begins. The duality of the pots is reminiscent of the duality of the karagams of Paccaivāḷiyamman and Agni (above, pp. 117-18), and we would like to see the goddess and her Suḍalai Māḍan in this doubling. But nothing would immediately allow this interpretation. Probably this first rite is intended to remove obstacles to a victorious procession (an echo of the preliminary sacrifice to the śaktis in Āndhra).[206]

Celliyamman, however, receives no blood sacrifice during her koḍai, at least not presently. Her worshippers content themselves with offering cooked meat to her guardians, where Taḷavāy Māḍan appears beside Bhairava and Vetāḷam. If a goat is offered (no doubt to Māḍan), it must be immolated on the bank of the tank opposite the Celliyamman temple; let us recall that Taḷavāy Māḍan also bears the name Karaiyaḍi Māḍan, Māḍan on the bank of the tank. The goddess does not appear to be particularly fond of flesh, even though, as we already noted in Āndhra, like all local goddesses (with the exception of Śiva's consort) she would be assimilated to Kālī. But an offering to Māḍan, who is in her service, is ultimately also an offering to her. Moreover, by the presence of alcohol alone, even should there be no meat, the rite of madupoṅgal represents a nonvegetarian offering. And this is done in the presence of the goddess's utasavamūrti.

On the contrary, in the Kōṉār quarter Muppiḍāri necessarily receives animal victims during her koḍai, after the chariot procession: she occupies the central position of Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra, near whom the buffalo is immolated. It is only a question of goats, but there are still distinctions among them. One begins by immolating a young goat offered by the temple, the head of which is placed on the goddess's balipīṭha, to be followed by red goats for the goddess and then black goats for Māḍan. Moreover, the first goat is necessarily offered by the pañcāyat president who, in that function, represents the entire village. The distinction is double: there is the young goat apparently offered to the goddess, whose significance we would hardly see because the goat given by the village is offered to her next; then, as the Kōṉārs are devotees of Suḍalai Māḍan, they also offer votive black goats to Māḍan, after the reddish-brown goats (very literally "red," as M.-L. Reiniche rightly says) are consecrated to the goddess. Would not the young goat in reality be intended as the goddess's victim par excellence: here the first red goat offered by the pañcāyat president, elsewhere the buffalo (as above, pp. 234-35, in the buffalo sacrifice to Aiyirattamman), incarnation of Mahiṣa—or of Pōtu Rāju? It is impossible to decide, and in any case, since the significance is no longer conscious, it is obvious that we shall never have a response. But we must continue to raise the question to the degree that, at least in certain cases, a goat is clearly offered to the Buffalo,

[205]See Reiniche 1979, 157 n. 16 on the preparation of this dough. One finds there a recollection of the *navadhānya* rite, the germination of nine types of grain during Navarātri or other public or domestic rituals.

[206]Reiniche 1979, 171-72 shows an altogether analogous rite for the kodais of Maravar and Ācāri goddesses, but accompanied by the sacrifice of cocks at the northern and southern exits of their respective quarters.

while the buffalo unquestionably goes to the goddess. Again we find the goddess/Māḍaṉ duality in the dance of the Kōṉārs possessed by Suḍalai Māḍaṉ, who go through the village when the blood sacrifices to Muppiḍāri have ended: each carries a karagam on the head (Reiniche 1979, Pls. 1-5), except one, the oldest, who holds a trident decorated with neem leaves (idem, 167 n. 32). Do these karagams represent the goddess, as we would be justified in thinking whenever there is a pot of water? But then who does the trident signify with the lemon impaled upon it? The goddess or Māḍaṉ? This question must, of course, also be left unanswered. But our intention is to indicate a difference between the multiple karagams and the trident; and since no one is possessed by the goddess, the ambiguity is total.

These few remarks regarding a ritual that is in reality more complex than indicated are only intended to demonstrate that Māḍaṉ is associated with the festival of the goddess (and the two Māḍaṉs at the complementary festivals of the two goddesses) in a way that must call to mind the situation in Āndhra villages at the time of buffalo sacrifices. A solid intermediary link is provided by the buffalo sacrifice to Aiyir-attamman. The whole structure is maintained, all the symbols are present, but the distance separating the cult of the village goddess from the Vedic animal sacrifice has become greater. The thread is not broken, but it has become quite indiscernible to the actors in the festival, as well as to uninformed observers. When, however, one has taken care to prepare the ground, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Māḍaṉ is Mahiṣāsura.

3. Karuppu, the Black One

Initially, there would have been no excuse to push our curiosity as far as Karuppu had we not seen him in Kongunad associated with the post-husband in the cult of Māriyamman, and had he not been himself the object of a form of worship on his own there that recalled the importance of water in the ritual that surrounds the post. In Tanjavur, he was also associated with the impalement stake and hooks in connection with Kāttavarāyaṉ. We have been tempted on several occasions to liken him to the Buffalo, but he is not so easy to decipher in this role as Pōtu Rāju, and we have thus been unable to draw any real conclusion where the myth of Reṇukā is prominent. Yet even when Kāttavarāyaṉ is no longer mentioned, as in Kongunad, we are hesitant to deny Karuppu a connection with Māriyamman's post-husband, and besides, everything is such as to ensure the superimposition and homology of the two myths (or of the two forms of the myth of the goddess), that of Reṇukā and that of the young Brahman wife of the eater of buffalo meat: the epic Kārtavīrya is king of the marshy regions and, as if by chance, his capital is Māhiṣmatī. In a less "epic" context, one could very well see him as a buffalo king. We would therefore like to identify Karuppu more precisely, even if the specific form of the post is not immediately identifiable. Should it turn out that, like Māḍaṉ, he has a rapport with the buffalo, this would greatly support the probability of the presence of the Buffalo in the post with an indefinite (but epic) form in the Māriyamman festival.

Here we have left the sphere of the "grand cults" (although see below, 250 ff.) and shall venture on nearly random divagations. Leaving aside the fact of his presence in

boundary temples to Māriyammaṉ and Kālī, Kaṟuppu is in effect one of the principal pēys in Tamilnadu. His name varies: Kaṟuppaṉ, Kaṟuppacāmi, Kaṟuppaṉacāmi, Kaṟupparāyaṉ, etc., the constant element being *kaṟu,* "black."[207] There is nothing unusual about an inferior god complementary to Aiyaṉār and the Goddess being black. But the buffalo is also black and its color contributes as much as its ponderousness to making it a creature of *tamas,* darkness, or, in a word, a demon (in a more classical register, the mount of Yama, god of the dead). Because of the variety of his representations, Kaṟuppu cannot initially be compared to anything known to us, nor above all can he be seen as a derivative of the form we are tracking. In fact, we are surprised to find, if not this form itself, at least aspects that link Kaṟuppu to the same Vedic sacrificial model, as if his devotees were to have had direct access to brahmanic speculation, or on the contrary, to features linking him unexpectedly and remotely to the Pōtu Rāju complex. Thus while discovering a deeper meaning of this demon, we shall have new occasions to ask how ideas have followed their course within Hindu society; and, in the absence of irrefutable historical documentation, we shall confine ourselves to the most evident facts. Kaṟuppu can be an excellent check on any simplistic and linear interpretation of the transmission of brahmanical schemas.

Other than his affinity with water, which is scarcely expressed outside Kongunad, let us also recall that, in the same region, he is associated with latex-bearing trees that are perhaps substitutes for the pipal of Āndhra (the symbolism of which, it will be remembered, goes back to Vedic ritual). In the far south, Maṟavars are his fervent devotees, but it is impossible, given the present state of our investigation, to account for all the castes that offer him privileged worship, considering the vast geographical area in which one finds him. Here we will focus on his iconography. Setting aside his representation by triśūlas of a particular form proper to the region north of Paḻaṉi (southern Kongunad; see above, p. 205 and plate 85), the bulging central point of which is due to the ubiquity of Subrahmaṇya and his vēl, Kaṟuppu is very often represented by a quite atypical aniconic stone. But among his most common images, there are some that unmistakably distinguish him. First he is simply the sacrificial weapon, or the weapon that symbolizes that of the sacrifice, if the one is not entirely identical with the other. It is erected on a platform and is sometimes a straight tapered blade, sometimes a kind of slightly curved knife, and at other times it is the arivāḷ well known as the instrument for decapitating goats (plate 85). We can already contrast this type of representation with that found, for example, of Kāttavarāyaṉ. The latter is the god of the impalement stake, but a myth makes him first and always the impaled victim, not the one who impales. He can sometimes even be figured on the impalement stake (plates 90, 91, and above, p. 237 and n. 188: one will notice the extraordinary hourglass drum that Kāttavarāyaṉ holds, as if to make visible the stake plunged into his body—the drum repeating the curved shape of the Vedic caṣāla). Kaṟuppu, on the contrary, is the sacrificial weapon insofar as he holds it more symbolically as patron of the sacrifice rather than as executioner.

[207]Concerning Kaṟuppu, one must refer to Dumont 1953 and 1957, 368 ff. and 396 ff., but the elements that we address here are not borrowed from him. We regard as accepted his general conclusions concerning the double subordination of Kaṟuppu to the goddesses and to Aiyaṉār, and concerning Kaṟuppu's fondness for meat offerings.

Halfway between the aniconic stone and the metal weapon one would place the small tapered stone post that appears in front of Māriyamman at Cennimalai and quite resembles an impalement stake, as also certain very pointed Pōtu Rājus in Āndhra (see above, pp. 18 and 120).

His anthropomorphic effigies make him one of the innumerable and minimally individualized vīras of the Tamil countryside. But one can, for example, distinguish him with certainty from the Māḍans in Tirunelveli (plates 98, 99). Like the latter, he has at times the side chignon of an asura, at other times the royal tiara, and his left hand rests on a cekkumāndaḍi. He wears the three-stranded belt with the dagger, and the slack cord falling over the legs is also normally represented. These latter features already associate him with the symbolism of the yūpa (and of course we may generalize and find the same symbolism at work with anonymous vīras who present the same details). But his right hand always holds the arivāḷ, the sacrificial weapon that already suffices to denote him at Tamil countryside sites. Moreover, he is generally figured in the round, or at least standing against an outlined stele; and if there is a stele, it never has the specific form of a post, as for Māḍan. In fact, only the cekkumāndaḍi evokes this form. This type of image is very widespread, and were it the only one, we could conclude that there is a very tenuous, and in any case diminished, link with the complex symbol from which we set out.

Can one still speak of a human form as regards a representation that is undoubtedly unique, the very rarity of which speaks volumes for the subterranean advances of brahmanical knowledge? The question returns us to the Karuppurāyacāmi already mentioned in connection with the preparation of the yūpa (see above, p. 34 n. 5), whose temple is located in Kōyilvaḷi (Coimbatore Dt., Palladam Tk.), north of Palani. Lost in the open country, his sanctuary is nevertheless not abandoned; he has a paṇḍāram priest, and the abundance of terra-cotta votive animals found all around (bulls, rams, horses) expresses both "royal" status, as his name already denotes, and probably also indicates the presence of herder devotees. He certainly cuts a good figure in the local pantheon, for he has a guardian in front of his shrine, Edircāmi ("the god in front"), and he has a swing for use at his festival. But the most remarkable feature comes with the principal mūrti. A permanent building, nearly cubical, has been erected around a bilva (*Aegle marmelos*) in such a way that the tree's branches spread above the roof, while inside, the trunk serves as support of the mūrti, not to say simply as the mūrti itself. The part of the trunk exposed to worship is blackened and sculpted over about sixty centimeters (plate 100), to such an extent that one might ask how the tree has survived the treatment; but it is likely that the bark was left intact on the opposite side that faces the sanctuary wall. The "sculpture" leaves no doubt that it is a rudimentary human form, the eyes of inlaid glass clearly enough marked for one to be able to see a man whose arms are raised and parallel; this is the position to be assumed by the patron of the Vedic sacrifice to determine the length of the yūpa, and one knows that it represents the position of both the king offered as victim and the victorious king (having offered his enemy in his own stead). It is also, as far as we can know, the position of the small golden puruṣa of the agnicayana. Karuppurāyacāmi is, therefore, here an authentic Vedic puruṣa whose form stands out from the tree, which for its own part appears as a potential yūpa. The bilva, apart from being Śiva's favored tree, is one of

the species acceptable as material for the sacrificial post. Daily worship is essentially performed on three small pīṭhas (whose form has nothing in common with the pīḍams in Tirunelveli) placed at the tree's base, the one in the center having similar eyes to the puruṣa's eyes above it. The image hewn in the sapwood is too crude to have attributes. But it is surrounded by metal lamps shaped like vēls, and there is even a vēl leaning against the back wall, very near the tree trunk, as if to serve as the deity's weapon. It is impossible to forget the classical iconography here, and moreover in its most exceptional aspects: what else does a liṅga dating from the second century AD (from the region of Mathurā) signify, doubled along its full height by an anthropomorphic Śiva who bears the long slack cord noted earlier, but this time wound around the god's body just like the grass cord around the sacrificial animal? The liṅga itself presents at head-level a slight collar that makes it resemble Pōtu Rāju (Kramrisch 1981, 11 n. 10). The supreme Puruṣa does not scorn to appear as both victim and sacrificer-who-measures-the-post.[208] Also, how is one not to think of the MBh episode in which Aśvatthāman, another warrior Brahman, dedicates himself to Śiva, entering an oblatory fire to obtain the destruction of his enemies, his father's Kṣatriya killers (cf. Rāma Jāmadagnya!)? The text, very precise, shows Aśvatthāman "offered in oblation, immobile and arms raised" (*tam ūrdhvabāhuṃ niśceṣṭam...havir upasthitam* [10.7.61a (7.59a)]). We have already said that the warrior Brahman is as catastrophic for the Earth as the Kṣatriya who oppresses Brahmans, and that both come dangerously close to the asura who overturns the world order. Conversely, the asura, should he subordinate himself to the Goddess and the superior gods who ensure order, also appears as the sacrificer-victim offered on the sacrificial post.

Of course, Kaṟuppu fulfills a function that draws him considerably closer to the asuric Buffalo converted to the Goddess's service, that is, Pōtu Rāju. But the symbolism Kaṟuppu brings into play recalls the Buffalo only by the properly Vedic elements that Pōtu Rāju took up again, and that does not suffice to identify Kaṟuppu with the Buffalo. Notably, the component of fire is absent, unless the vēl-shaped lamps are seen as supplying its presence. It remains, however, to consider another perhaps unique representation of Kaṟuppu that will preoccupy us for a moment. We have already mentioned the Māriyammaṉ temple in Samayapuram-Kaṇṇaṉūr (Tiruchirapalli Dt., Lalgudi Tk.) and have referred to the recent "confiscation" by the government there that endowed the temple with gurukkaḷ priests and placed it under the control of the devasthāna of the Śrīraṅganātha temple in Śṛīraṅgam.[209] One knows that this temple is one of the very few in the South that, in the hands of Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmans, only a few years ago closed its doors to non-Hindus at the fourth enclosure. Even though Māriyammaṉ is served by gurukkaḷ priests, who are in any case inferior to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas in status, the goddess nevertheless retains her title of Viṣṇu's sister and has a right every year to gifts from her brother. She is separated from him by the Koḷḷiḍam (Coleroon) River, a branch of the Kāverī that surrounds the island of Śrīraṅgam. Her processional mūrti proceeds with great ceremony to the middle of the river, which is dry during the month

[208]Separated as they are by centuries as well as by space and levels in the social hierarchy, it is worthwhile to draw these two representations closer. They call for further study.

[209]We shall abstain from any comment regarding the political aspects of this operation.

of Tai (January-February), and there she receives delegates from her brother who bring her jewels, saris, and other gifts. It would hardly be possible to indicate more clearly the inferiority of the goddess with respect to the god. In her temple, however, the gurukkaḷs have dispelled—at least so it would seem initially—every trace of popular worship. There are several festivals each year, as for all prosperous temples. But the principal one is no longer spoken of as a tiruviḻā, but rather as a brahmotsava: processions on different vāhanas succeed one another to culminate on the tenth day in the tēr procession. During this time, an uninterrupted flow of pilgrims fills the temple and its surroundings. A large number of them have made diverse vows that they now fulfil,[210] reminding us that we are in the Kāverī basin, not far from Māriyammaṉ temples that have impalement stakes with hooks. There is no question here of firewalking, but we are surprised to find penitents among the devotees who carry around a kind of cage hooked to their skin at several points. Others pierce their cheeks or tongues with needles, and still others are carried, suspended from hooks inserted through the skin of their backs that hang from a horizontal bamboo pole mounted on a bullock cart. Finally, others carry firepots, pūcaṭṭi. All are abundantly doused with water all along the route by groups of relatives and neighbors who have an obligation to accompany them. We of course find once again forms already known to us, but ones associated primarily with different regions (perhaps disclosing the provenance of the pilgrims). If the hooks and needles may come from the lower Kāverī basin, the pūcaṭṭis may come from Kongunad. Near the temple, beneath the large maṇḍapa at the entrance, women enter into trance and are consulted as oracles. This all transpires in a large crowd and amidst the greatest indifference to the āgamic rite that is taking place at the same time. The gurukkaḷs have only to channel the throngs of people who come for darśana of the goddess.

If, on a day without ceremony, one visits the vast but simple temple with two covered enclosures around the sanctuary, to which is added the maṇḍapa at the entrance, no trace is found of the kaḻumaram, which, farther to the east, stands in front of Māriyammaṉ temples. The gurukkaḷ, who helpfully gave me details on the temple's successive festivals, is apparently unaware of Karuppu. As for Kāttavarāyaṉ, he has, says the gurukkaḷ, a temple not far from there at Pāccūr (Tiruchirapalli Dt., Lalgudi Tk.) that has no connection with the Samayapuram-Kaṇṇaṉūr Māriyammaṉ temple.[211] During the visit to the latter conducted by the gurukkaḷ, I stopped short in front of an utsavamūrti of Cellāyi, placed very near the one for Māriyammaṉ in the same subshrine. My guide admitted that it was the processional mūrti of Cellaṇḍiyammaṉ, a goddess also called Ellaipiḍāri, whose temple is located on the northern boundary of Kaṇṇaṉūr. The latter's

[210]Cf. Younger 1980, 495 ff. We shall not reproduce here in an exhaustive manner the different varieties of penance. We shall soon return to a festival at this temple (below, p. 256).

[211]This small Kāttavarāyaṉ sanctuary is not effectively connected with Samayapuram; it does not even seem to be linked with the Māriyammaṉ in Pāccūr, but rather with Kāmāksiyammaṉ, who is his mother. The three small shrines are the property of a large Vellāla landowning family that sees to their maintenance and the worship there, and provides the priests and the possessed. Kāttavarāyaṉ's cult is spectacular because it consists essentially in the erection of a cedil pole surmounted by a kind of cage in which the person possessed by Kāttavarāyaṉ climbs to represent the god's impalement. While speaking of this, the owners evoke the cedil in Nāgapattiṉam (above, pp. 125-26). The local myth has been entirely redone, but the Brahman woman whom Kāttavarāyaṉ covets is the daughter of a king. Some "truths" have a hard life.

festival is paid for by the Samayapuram Māriyamman temple; that is the only link between the two goddesses admitted by the gurukkaḷ. He nevertheless claims for Māriyamman a central position in the village, notwithstanding her local myth. She is said to have left Samayapuram, the locality proper, to come here, to Kaṇṇanūr, when it was a forest, having fled the promiscuity of the impure inhabitants of the village, notably the meat-eating Mutrācas. What does "center" mean in such a context?

But what does this "pure" cult signify around a mūlavar who is not to be counted among the most "peaceful" of Māriyammans? This is a painted clay representation, seated and with eight arms, while the right leg hangs downward, reposing on the severed heads of three asuras. The gurukkaḷ does not know their names, but we would like to prompt him: Amban, Ambakan, Ambalikan. . . . And we think again of the triple pīṭha that receives the daily worship offered to Karuppurāyacāmi, as well as the three-pronged post in Kongunad.[212] In front of the clay mūrti is an identical bronze statue, which receives the abhiṣeka. At the pediment of her temple, Māriyamman stands on a severed buffalo head. In other words, one has reasons to scan for the remains of a cult that must have been locally more characteristic of, and adapted to, its protective function.

In order to tighten our findings, I leave aside the Ellaipiḍāri temple to the north, inasmuch as it would provide us with no new keys to rituals already known. It is useful, however, to know that a gurukkaḷ goes there twice to perform a rite to the utsavamūrti during the goddess's annual sixteen-day festival in Māci; that this festival includes a procession in which the goddess is preceded by a pot containing a mixture of rice and goat's blood, a procession that goes around the settlement and passes in front of the Samayapuram Māriyamman temple; and finally, that a group of fifteen Mutrācas wielding tapered bamboo sticks, and accompanied by the executioner from the same caste, comes on the fifteenth day with the goddess, who rides a horse, to Māriyamman's maṇḍapa in Samayapuram and sacrifices a goat there. The latter's head is thrown in the air by a Paṟaiyar and must be caught by one of the fifteen Mutrācas, who impales it on his stick; he will bear it triumphantly in procession to the boundary temple of Ellaipiḍāri (*ellai* = "limit"). Of course the maṇḍapa is not the sanctuary, but the kaḷumarams on the banks of the Kāverī are either beneath the maṇḍapa or just outside it. In other words, Māriyamman finds her impalement stake in another form, of which the gurukkaḷ is apparently unaware.

We now can come to Karuppu, whose temple is two or three hundred meters away, behind Māriyamman's, and opens to the south (Māriyamman faces east). His festival again discloses a number of links with the large neighboring temple. Karuppu is brought on a painted wooden horse that is kept there, though no one mentioned it, and the two-day celebration in Vaikāci (May-June) begins the day after the spring festival—*vasantotsava*—of Māriyamman. But one also learns surreptitiously that the devotees of the goddess who pierce themselves with hooks at the time of the brahmotsava in Paṅguni come to do so in front of Karuppu, and begin their route from his sanctuary. Is the latter not sometimes the "Lord of the impalement stake" in this region? The links are thus multiple. After all, the shift from Karuppu's shrine to the goddess's certainly has

[212]Cf. above, p. 244 and n. 202 regarding the triplicity of the goddess Muppiḍāri.

nothing to do with the very recent "normalization" of the goddess's cult. In any case, the Kaṇṇaṉūr-Samayapuram temple has for a long time, perhaps because of its proximity to Śrīraṅgam, commanded great prestige and attracts pilgrims from the entire surrounding region. Māriyamman is not an ordinary grāmadevatā there, which is already expressed by the myth of her exile in the forest. But Karuppu still remains her guardian according to his myth. Least surprising in all this is not that the goddess seems to have utterly forgotten that she was Reṇukā; in fact, she loses all "human" reference in order to be nothing but the Goddess.

The Karuppu temple is perhaps no longer a "village temple" in the usual sense of the term. The priest is a Piḷḷai (Veḷḷāḷa) and the sanctuary is located in a quarter where sixty Piḷḷai families live; the head of each is entitled to perform pūjā to Karuppu. The building includes two small chapels, separated by the temple kitchen, with Karuppu on the right and Madurai Vīran on the left. The latter, a "classical" warrior, with his dagger raised in his right hand, his sword lowered in his left, is not the main deity. He seems to double for Karuppu, somewhat as Karuppu doubles for Kāttavarāyan in the Māriyamman temples located farther to the east. Karuppu, on the other hand, offers an image with a surprisingly new character (plate 101): the myth reveals that the central motif is a banana flower. It is sculpted in high relief and reposes on a round socle, itself placed on a kind of long stone cushion, a replica of the armrest-cushions arranged for sitting on the floor in traditional shops. Around the flower, in bas-relief, are motifs that seem to imitate cords forming decorative knots. The cord that directly encircles the banana flower and passes behind its top stands out from the background near the base. Its two ends cross and rest on the cushion in front of the peduncle of the flower. The cross-section of these cords corresponds to those of the tightly twisted cotton torches of the Mahārāṣṭrian Pot-rāj, or the torches carried by the "possessed" in Tōṭṭampatti (plates 83, 14). But curiously, although we would logically expect two sections representing the two ends of the cord, three identical sections lie on the cushion. The whole relief is framed in a kind of stone prabhā or nimbus forming a niche, and on either side is an arivāḷ placed at the base of the prabhā. In front of Karuppu's chapel, but a few meters outside the veranda, there is a sort of brickwork block, a parallelepiped, the vertical face of which is divided into seven segments by identical, but very crude, small figures. These are the seven *toṭṭiyattu nāyakkaṉmārkaḷ,* the seven Nāyakkars of Toṭṭiyam.

The presence of the latter is explained in the temple myth. Tōṭṭiyam would be a locality near Karūr (west of Tiruchirapalli in the direction of Kongunad)[213] where seven Nāyakkar brothers lived. When Māriyamman took refuge in Kaṇṇaṉūr, there was talk of her power and the brothers wanted to take possession of her so as to install her among themselves. Māriyamman told them that, before doing so, they would first have to vanquish her guardian, the warrior Kāruppaṉacāmi (Karuppu's precise name at Kaṇṇaṉūr). The seven brothers strove to do this, but Karuppaṉa assumed the form of a banana flower with innumerable petals. Removing the petals one by one, they exhausted themselves, at which moment Karuppu chose to kill them. The seven Nāyak-

[213]In Puttūr (Tanjavur Dt., Sirkali Tk.), Kāttavarāyan's younger brother came from Toṭṭiyam, which thus made him an inhabitant of Kerala.

kars reproached him for having taken advantage of their weakness, an act that in effect goes against the code of the perfect epic warrior. The goddess's guardian also accords them a favor in compensation for his ruse; they would be associated with his cult by Kaṟuppu's devotees.

Accordingly, the relative autonomy of the Black God's sanctuary gives rise to a new hierarchization: the demon servant of the goddess, Kaṟuppu, subordinates to himself other demons who we can imagine to have attracted the most impure part of the cult. Their title, Nāyakkars or "chiefs," does not designate a specific caste. On the plane of myth, the goddess's demand that Kaṟuppu mediate between herself and her enemies recalls the condition placed by Caṇḍī in the *Devīmāhātmya* on marrying the king of asuras: he will only be able to marry her after defeating her in combat. Here, Kaṟuppu is the double of the warrior goddess, and the marriage theme has disappeared.

When the two-day festival is celebrated, the Veḷḷāḷas first go to fetch the Kaṟuppu on horseback kept at the Māriyamman̲ temple, and place him facing the Kaṟuppaṉacāmi mūlavar. The pūcāri offers worship (with a meal of cooked rice) to the two mūlavars (Kaṟuppu and Madurai Vīran̲) and to the two small stones set in the ground in front of them—which are the "true" deities. Just before the ārati with camphor, a Mutrāca (a member of the caste of meat-eating temple guards from whom the goddess had fled) is called to sacrifice in front of each of the two demon-gods a goat purchased by all the local Piḷḷais. This sacrifice is followed by votive offerings from visitors belonging to other castes, who come here after having attended the Māriyamman̲ festival that ended the day before. The same Mutrāca executioner immolates the victims. The pūcāri collects blood from all the goats and mixes it in a clay pot with cooked rice he has taken, before offering it to the deities, from their meals. Seven banana leaves (traditional "plates" in South India) are placed in front of the seven brothers, and the mixture of blood and rice is distributed on them as a food offering. The priest then puts the mixture back in the pot and scatters it in the four directions around the temple, before throwing the pot itself outside the enclosure. The priest subsequently performs his ablutions and offers pūjā to the two deities. On the second day, the same Mutrāca sacrifices two goats. Their meat is cooked at the same time as the rice and this meal is offered to the two mūlavars and to the Kāṟuppu on horseback. After a pūjā, some two hundred persons share the meat and rice. The wooden Kaṟuppu returns the same evening to the Māriyamman̲ temple.

Blood sacrifices continue to protect the locality, with or without a gurukkaḷ, and the blood offering retains its apotropaic significance. One could hardly detect the vestiges of an aśvamedha, and the goddess is kept completely apart from the spilled blood, even if some of her devotees are less removed. The sacrifice on the first day is offered to the two demons, but they receive only a vegetarian meal, as is generally the case for the goddess. As with other offerings, one must distinguish the ultimate beneficiary—here, the two demons—from whoever partakes—here the group of seven brothers from beyond the locality, symbols of all danger that comes from outside. Only on the second day does the flesh of the victims constitute the meal of the demons and their Piḷḷai devotees, who identify themselves with them. But it is above all the unusual representation of Kaṟuppaṉacāmi that draws our attention. What are we to make of this banana flower? Formally, its identification is quite easy. With a minimum of stylization, the banana

flower transforms itself into a perfect Pōtu Rāju—in a region where this form is absent: one must go downriver as far as the delta to find the stone post *with* vīraṉ. Everything is there: the upper knob, the ring and the round shaft. But once again, it is no servile imitation or copy with loss of meaning. Rather, it is a reinterpretation of the same symbol, a reinterpretation that is today unconscious, but that must have once been living, if not entirely conscious. In effect, it is already remarkable that the flower would be surrounded by cords that recall the grass bonds of the yūpa, its three-stranded belt (which becomes the triple end) and the rope that binds the animal. In relation to Pōtu Rāju, it is an innovation, but an innovation that rediscovers the symbolism of the yūpa. The relationship between its form and the yūpa is not lost, and was perhaps even made closer by drawing advantage—who knows?—from the proximity of numerous Brahman villages in the Kāverī delta where Vedic rituals are still performed.[214]

The banana flower undoubtedly lent itself to this transformation at the same time as it assumed a precise significance in the framework of the account, for it reveals itself to be invincible through the abundance of its petals. The "original" idea lies above all in the utilization of the flower. But the banana tree itself is linked to an entire symbolism, whose roots reach back once again to the epic and perhaps beyond. The main thing for us is that we shall soon meet it again in connection with the vaṉṉi-maram—that is, the śamī—in the celebration of Vijayādaśamī (below, pp. 271 ff.): sometimes a young banana tree doubles for a śamī branch; sometimes it replaces the śamī tree entirely, a banana tree being easier to find than a śamī. It will suffice for the moment to anticipate this unfolding of the theme by returning to the neighboring Māri-yammaṉ temple to obtain the local myth of the goddess's victory over an asura. There is no word of a banana tree, but one does hear a rare, if not unique, variant of the pan-Indian account. The demon who must confront the goddess is Nimbāsura (*nimpasuraṉ* in Tamil), of whom it is only known that he is an asura. When she severs his head, he enters a vaṉṉimaram, but the drops of his blood fallen to the ground give birth to other asuras, whom the goddess also slays, except for one who escapes, Śūrapadma—whom one rediscovers as one of the demonic adversaries of Subrahmaṇya. This victory is commemorated on the tenth day of Navarātri, Vijayādaśamī. On this day, the processional mūrti is taken to a small maṇḍapa located in the outermost enclosure of her temple, in the northwest, very near the *sthalavṛkṣa,* "the (protective) tree of the place," obviously a neem, in Sanskrit *nimba,* for which a hole was made in the roof of the maṇḍapa with only the trunk visible within. Nimbāsura very clearly has some connection to this tree that represents him.[215] In fact, we get a better understanding of the disappearance from the temple of the impalement stake and of any representation of Kaṟuppu: the neem takes his place, and the refreshing powers one attributes to it in relation to the goddess of fevers eclipse its asuric status. If we evoke Pōtu Rāju, always adorned with neem leaves for goddess festivals, one thing is beyond doubt: when married to the pipal, the neem is an obvious substitute for the śamī ("that which calms," or, on the contrary, that which keeps the fire "in a latent state"). We are thus not surprised to see Nimbāsura's

[214]Cf. Stein 1980, passim.

[215]Which might invite a more general reflection on the notion of sthalavṛkṣa.

vital principle (his *uyir*), which escapes when the goddess severs his head, take refuge in a śamī, a vaṉṉimaram according to the Tamils. The passage from one tree to the other thus for once takes place explicitly, and, linked as it is to the demon's death, we can understand that it implies at the same time the latter's conversion to the goddess's service. Of course it should be remembered that on the pediment of this same temple, Māriyammaṉ appears standing on the severed head of a buffalo.

If we now return to the Kaṟuppu temple where Kaṟuppu transforms himself into a banana flower, we find a new form of substitution, for which it is always necessary to return to the "śamī" function, in which fire is latent, rather than to the vaṉṉimaram, the "fire-tree" or "tree with fire," the Tamil name for which could lead one to forget the calm and cooling quality inherent in the neem and banana trees.[216] Moreover, this symbolism is known throughout Tamilnadu: the banana tree being female (Skt. *kadalī*) and associated with water, the relation of the new substitute to the Buffalo becomes clearer, for both are fond of water. The Vedic symbolism, having passed through epic and the local countryside where banana plantations bathe in water, conceding it only to rice and coconut palms, brings us to this more than simply innocuous representation of the Buffalo demon. The asuric devotee of the Goddess has never been made so reassuring and full of the promise of life.

Thus the suspicion we have entertained since Kongunad regarding Kaṟuppu's identity finds here some confirmation. It is certainly true that many transformations must be seen together and that they assume a long elaboration of symbols. But it does not suffice to say that Kaṟuppu is a vīraṉ like the others (unless they were all Buffalo?), any more than it would to say the same of Māḍaṉ. Kaṟuppu is one of the hidden representations of the Buffalo become devotee of the Goddess, and, through her mediation, a guardian of Aiyaṉār. It is he who, in Kongunad, is the goddess's post-husband: in this form, the myth from Karṇāṭaka and the Reṇukā myth operate conjointly. In Samayapuram, without any reference ever having been made to it, we can rather detect themes from the *Devī-māhātmya,* either in the Kaṟuppu myth (above), or in that of Māriyammaṉ: the blood drops that fall to the ground and produce just as many asuras are taken from the episode of Raktabīja, or are an echo of it (DM 8.48 ff.), without the appearance of Kālī (DM 8.58). It is in this that the Samayapuram site remains apart. But the variant it represents allows us to return to a detail of the ritual in Kongunad that has remained somewhat like an appendix to the rest. This is the sacrifice of a cock to Kaṟuppu at Ceṉṉimalai, as well as at Tōṭṭampatti, which is eaten on the site by the pāṇḍaram on the last day of the festival, when everything has concluded and the goddess's sanctum has been carefully closed (see above, pp. 161-62 and 195-96, where Muṉiyappaṉ takes part in Kaṟuppu's meal). This last offering is, in fact, intended for the previously sacrificed victims, the last goat in Ceṉṉimalai, whose blood enables the buffalo at Toṭṭampatti to marry the goddess. The goat at Ceṉṉimalai is itself the substitute for a buffalo. We have suspected from the outset that among the victims of different kinds offered in a goddess festival, some of them must be offered to the main victim, deified by having been put to death and propitiated in this ritual.

[216]Cf. above, pp. 143, on the banana tree that is an agni-skambha, "fire-post."

Nor is it without interest to note that in this region where Brahmans were numerous, the landowners, essentially Veḷḷāḷas, offer privileged worship as much to Kaṟuppu as to Kāttavarāyaṉ. It would be mistaken to believe that the Brahmans wanted to see an elevation of Māriyammaṉ's status; that would mean ignoring the links that unite Veḷḷāḷas, gurukkaḷs, and the Śaivite monasteries of the Tamil south. It is thus the same non-Brahman upper castes that are found around the goddess and in temples to demons. The goddess Cellaṇḍiyammaṉ has a paṇḍāram priest, but it is once again the Veḷḷāḷa official for irrigation canals who presides over the goddess's procession with a pot of rice mixed with goat's blood and who carries the pot in front of the goddess. It can thus be assumed that the same upper castes include no fewer fervent devotees of Raṅganātha and, above all, of his neighbor, Jambukeśvara (the Śiva of Śrīraṅgam). Nothing would be more misleading than to divide Hindu society into two according to the criteria of the pure and impure: on the contrary, there is constant circulation from one sector to the other, communication and mutual support, and often unacknowledged complementarity. Despite her links with Kaṟuppu and Celḷandiyammaṉ, we would be hard pressed to decide whether Māriyammaṉ is a pure or an impure goddess, although she would not directly receive any blood sacrifice. Her brother Viṣṇu lets her know in any case that they are not to be equals. She allows demons to approach her too closely, and even needs them. Of course Viṣṇu needs her, but that is another story.

III. The Śamī

The śamī, one recalls, is the material from which Pōtu Rāju is made. It is thus not surprising that our route of inquiry into variations on the post would have returned several times to the vannimaram, that is, to the śamī. The "fire-tree" has appeared as the form that Mahiṣa takes before being killed by the Goddess,[1] resuming for the Buffalo a mythic theme that recalls themes from the Brāhmaṇas and the epic (above, pp. 54-55), where it is Agni (= *vahni* > *vanni*), pursued by the gods in their anxiety for the power to sacrifice, who takes refuge in an aśvattha (= pipal). The proximity of the buffalo demon and the god Agni is brought out by the double passage from the god to the demon and from the aśvattha to the śamī, not to mention the gods who make way for the Goddess. One also finds the śamī associated with the Vanniyars in a much more symbolic manner under the name of Agnivīra, who is clearly given significance in the ritual (above, pp. 117 ff., and below, pp. 270 ff.), and is an eponymous hero of the caste, although Vanniyars disclaim him as such while declaring their lineage to be from Agni (the god!). The vannimaram is also spectacularly integrated into the myth of Suḍalai Māḍaṉ: near a Śāstā temple on a mountain, this most beautiful (and thus royal) tree in the forest provisionally shelters the Māḍaṉ and his mother Brahmaśakti, and provides them a place of repose (above, pp. 241 ff.). The episode has the double advantage of reintroducing the Goddess (or the femininity of the śamī) Brahmaśakti, and of bringing forth *śānti*—peace, rest, the extinction of fire—which she symbolizes in echo of the epic myth; indeed, beyond this, the vannimaram here betrays its vocation as a post so well that the Pōtu Rāja of Āndhra seems not so far away. The Vanniyarāyaṉ of Koḷumadai and his rapport with the Maṟavars (above, pp. 236-37) is another emergence of the theme where the royal aspect is highlighted. In fact, one could have shed more light on the vannimaram, particularly at sites where one or another form of kaḷumaram is erected. Yet the vannimaram is not tied exclusively to the presence of the more or less symbolic impalement stake. This and the Tamil calendar's dissociation of local goddess

[1]At the Vanniyar temple of Cantaveli Ammaṉ at Kāñcipuram, for the last day of Navarātri (above, p. 115); at Rāmanāthapuram, for Vijayādaśamī as celebrated by the king for the protective goddess of his line (above, p. 116).

festivals—with which the kaḷumaram is usually associated—from the autumnal Durgā-pūjā, which, in the south, passes unnoticed and is concentrated on Vijayādaśamī, have led us to treat the latter's associations with the vaṉṉimaram separately. Whereas the preceding chapter treated the mythico-ritual features of the goddess festival (celebrated in the first part of the year, the uttarāyaṇa) with or without the buffalo sacrifice,[2] we now find that it is around Vijayādaśamī that the essentials concerning the śamī come to recluster. As a notable exception, however, we begin with the memories we were able to gather in situ of the buffalo sacrifices at Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam (South Arcot Dt., Viruddhacalam Tk.).

A. The Buffalo Sacrifice in Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam

If we single out this site well known in the past for its buffalo sacrifices, it is not because it would be unique of its kind in Tamilnadu. One would also have to mention, besides those in Kongunad or Gangaikondam (see above), such sites as Ambakarattūr (Pondicherry State) and Erumaiveṭṭipāḷaiyam (Chingleput Dt., Ponneri Tk.). Of these, the latter proves to be the most disappointing, notwithstanding its promising name, since buffalo sacrifices have long since ceased to be held there, and all that subsists is the local memory of a "river of blood" that the goddess had to traverse. In Māḍuveṭṭimaṅ-galam (South Arcot Dt., Viruddhacalam Tk.), the participants of earlier times, but above all the former zamindar who presided over the annual festival in Vaikāci (May-June), retain a very precise memory of its progress over a period of ten days. However, another feature has led us to single out this site and its festival: it is the only place discovered until now in south India where the buffalo sacrifice would be associated with a real śamī-pipal couple, in the absence of any form that would recall the post-god of Āndhra. This absence is more readily understandable as the pipal and the śamī are situated facing the entrance to the goddess's temple, at the very place where, in Āndhra, Pōtu Rāju would be installed, and because the buffalo sacrifice was performed at their base, to which seven shapeless stone posts, pierced by a hole, testify. These stones stand in the śamī's shade, or what should be the śamī's shade. In fact, the pipal is robust, whereas the śamī, suffocated by its proximity, or perhaps too old, is perishing (plates 102, 103).

Since the information is abundant and qualitatively good, we shall describe the devel-opment of the festival (in the present tense), taking care to bring out the homology of the whole with the goddess festivals in Āndhra. The framework has, however, become larger; seven villages participate in the celebration (Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam, Karaṇattam, Vicalūr, Pillūru, Kurumbūru, Puvanūr, Palliyapaṭṭu), without counting the devotees native to these villages who send a buffalo offered to the goddess in consequence of a vow. Fourteen buffalo are, in fact, required for the sacrifice, that is, twice seven, and every time one of the inhabitants makes a vow and consecrates a buffalo to the goddess

[2]Only the festival of Māriyamman at Cennimalai is celebrated in Aippaci (October-November), at a date near the autumn Durgāpūjā, in a context where the festivals seem to distribute themselves to the critical points of the calendar (above, pp. 157, 164-65, and 179).

of the place, Maṅgalanāyakī, he attaches to one of its horns a piece of cloth dyed yellow with turmeric and containing a coin. The buffalo is then allowed to roam freely in the proximity of the sanctuary until the next festival, and will be fed by everyone, wherever it happens to be. Generally, over fourteen buffalo are consecrated in a given year, but the fourteen most beautiful ones are selected for the sacrifice while the others are sold to profit the temple. After the sacrifices, the coins go to the executioner.

The temple itself has more importance than any of those seen in Āndhra dedicated to tutelary boundary goddesses (fig. 8). It is, however, also outside any settlement. The building is modest, but the organization is more complex. One of the reasons for this is no doubt that the goddess Maṅgalanāyakī is vegetarian and does not wish to view the animal sacrifices. At the very back of her sanctuary she is turned toward the west, and it is necessary to cross two maṇḍapas and a kind of ardhamaṇḍapa to arrive at the inner sanctum. In the first maṇḍapa the goddess's mount, a lion, stands guard, which immediately indicates a virgin goddess and not the consort of Śiva (in which case Nandin would replace the lion). The second maṇḍapa contains the processional statues: Śūlapiḍāri (the goddess's astra or weapon), Parā Śakti (the Supreme Śakti), Cāmuṇḍī (the terrible form of the goddess), Maṅgalanāyakī, and Gaṇeśa. Along the southern wall of the second maṇḍapa, outside, a chapel to Gaṇeśa opens to the east. The priest is a gurukkaḷ, which already indicates that he takes no part in the blood sacrifice, no more than does the goddess whose shrine will be closed at the crucial moment. The former zamindar, the local headman and still a large landowner, did not state his caste, but he is probably a Veḷḷāḷa.[3] The villagers gathered around do not hesitate to name the Paṟaiyars when they intervene. The zamindar speaks only of "Harijans."

On the last Tuesday in Cittirai (April-May), the gurukkaḷ places flowers on the goddess's mūrti to obtain her approval, according to the current practices. He then gives a yellow turmeric-colored thread—kāppu—to a Paṟaiyar drummer who, after tying it to his right wrist, ties another to the sacrificial knife. The man immediately sets off running at full speed through the seven villages, knife in hand (although he is not the executioner), to inform everyone that the festival will begin on the following Tuesday. Having completed his circuit, he returns to the temple and must henceforth remain at the vaṉṉimaram until the festival's completion, that is, for around fifteen days. On the next Tuesday, the gurukkaḷ ties a kāppu to his own right wrist, as well as to the goddess and all the utsavamūrtis; this is the true beginning of the festival.

The kāppu is known to provide protection, but it is also the sign that a process has been set in motion between the goddess and her devotees that must be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. An appalling story is told in the neighborhood[4] about a gurukkaḷ, linked by the kāppu to the goddess, who remained captive in the temple for three years because a quarrel had broken out in the village and the festival could not be held: he was

[3]I thank him here for the detailed account that he patiently gave me of the festival. Earnest in his religious duties, he was not attached to outward marks of prestige and, for example, had long ago renounced being taken to the festival in a palanquin. He expressed, with much self-control and without bitterness, his regret at the banning of sacrifices. Briefly, he belongs among those local chiefs who made me understand the importance of this ritual of the local collectivity for the very life of the collectivity.

[4]Thurston 1909, vol. 7, s.v. Udaiyān: 211. The buffalo sacrifice is described ibid., p. 210.

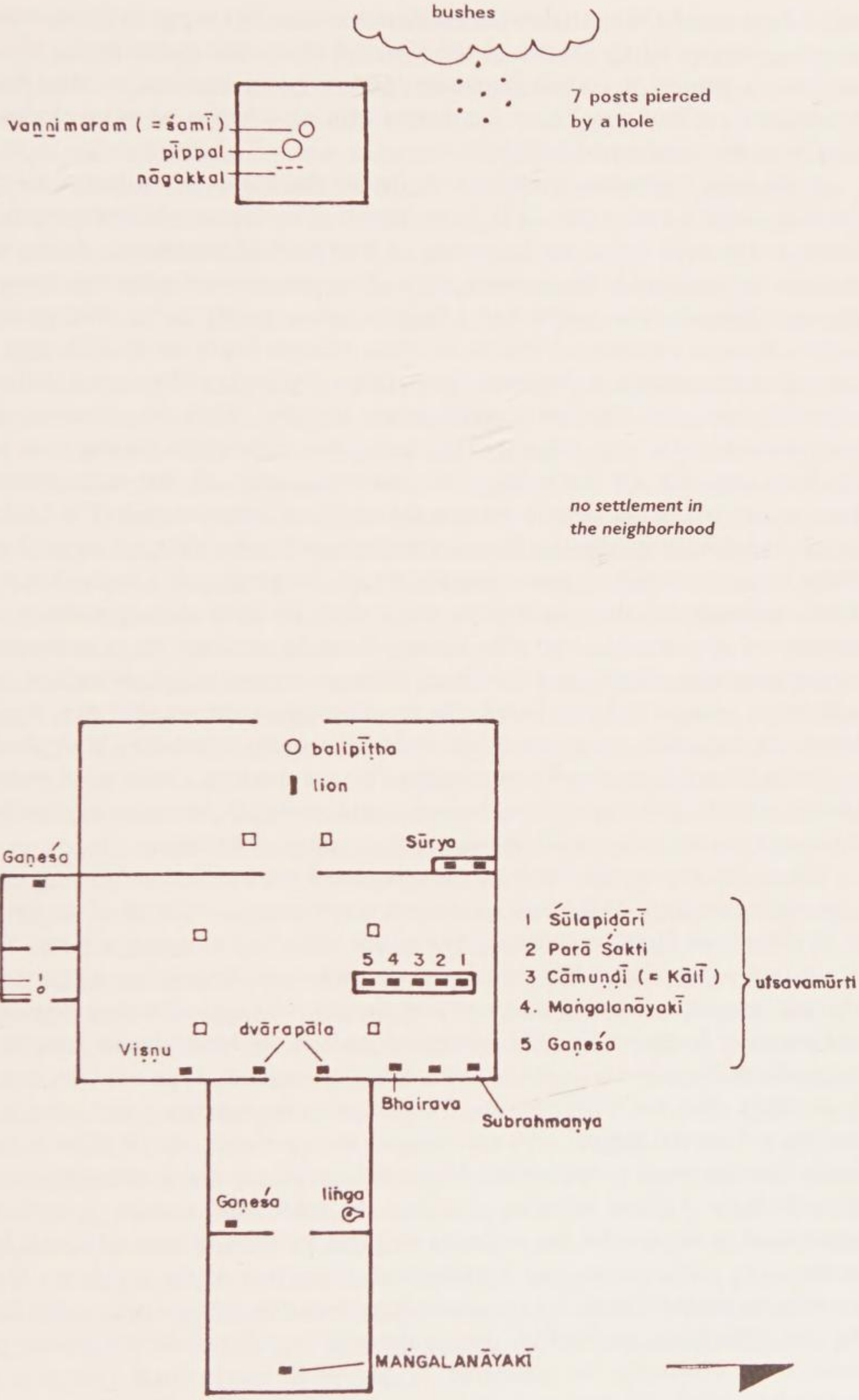

Fig. 8. Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam

afraid he would be subjected to the goddess's wrath. The kāppu is thus a sign of consecration, corresponding exactly to the piece of cloth tied to the horns of consecrated buffalo. It confers a certain immunity, but one that is circumscribed by a clearly determined cycle of ritual acts; the person wearing a kāppu no more eludes his "fate" than does the consecrated buffalo.

In the same preceding week (that is, during the Paṟaiyar's itinerant mission), only the daily abhiṣeka takes place within the temple. The day on which the gurukkaḷ ties the kāppu to his wrist marks the beginning of four days of procession, during which time the route is limited to Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam. Four processional mūrtis take part: Maṅgalanāyakī, Cāmuṇḍī (also called Kālī), Gaṇeśa (more readily called Vināyaka) and Śūlapiḍāri, the astra (weapon). Visits to the other villages begin on the fifth day, when Kālī alone goes out, namely to Puvanūr, the goddess's birth place, by way of Palliyapaṭṭu and Rūpanārāyaṇanallūr (the latter hamlet is not included in the list of seven villages and must attach itself to one of them). The zamindar is responsible for the costs incurred on the fifth day. On the sixth day, the procession with all the utsavamūrtis goes to Karaṇattam, where the night is spent in the temple of Subrahmaṇya. The Maṅgalanāyakī temple in Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam faces Karaṇattam, where the villagers locate the goddess's eldest brother. Indeed, it seems that the reason for passing this night in Karaṇattam is that Subrahmaṇya is the goddess's eldest brother. We have already noted in Āndhra the absence of any kinship tie with Viṣṇu. Here the kinship tie is reformulated, but legitimately with the region's sovereign deity. Any even remote reference to the *Devī-māhātmya* appears to be excluded. On the morning of the seventh day, one returns to Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam, where the deities rest until evening, when only Maṅgalanāyakī goes to Kurumbūru and returns the same night. We are unaware of the relationship between Maṅgalanāyakī and this village, but we could probably discover another kinship tie, since every ritual relationship is expressed in terms of kinship.

The eighth day stands out from the others and we are clearly drawing nearer to the culminating moment of the festival. Before any further movement of the deities, a goat is sacrificed; its blood is collected and mixed with fried rice and lemons, all of which is put into a pot. Śūlapiḍāri then leaves in procession and makes a tour of the seven villages, accompanied by a man carrying the pot who sprinkles its contents on people and places as he passes by. The procession ends at the Mandaiyandi temple, that is, at the platform that constitutes the (symbolic) territorial junction point of the seven villages. It is likely that the platform itself constitutes the sanctuary and that it has been constructed around a pipal. We are reduced to hypotheses, but it must in any case be noted that this focal point, where Śūlapiḍāri arrives, is the counterpart to the central Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra villages, and that the traditional *mandai* (platform) is here reproduced by the mandai that encircles the pipal and śamī in front of the Maṅgalanāyakī temple. The villagers say that Mandaiyandi is another of the goddess's brothers, the younger no doubt? There is a correspondence between the two points like that between the two Pōtu Rājus in Āndhra. As for the goat sacrifice and Śūlapiḍāri's procession, these must obviously be compared to the preliminary ritual intended to remove malevolent, or simply foreign, śaktis from the main sacrifice. The rice mixed with blood is the essential ingredient in this type of propitiatory rite.

When Śūlapiḍāri has returned to the Maṅgalanāyakī temple, all the utsavamūrtis go out "on horseback" for a procession through Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam; they are transported

on a vehicle that represents a wooden horse mounted on wheels. The ninth day is obviously the high point: proof, among other things, that the Goddess festival and the buffalo sacrifice follow the same pattern, notwithstanding variations in dates. We may wonder whether there is a reminiscence here of the eighth and ninth days, which correspond to the mahāṣṭamī and mahānavamī in the autumnal Durgāpūjā—mutatis mutandis, since there are quite considerable variations in detail, if only from the calendrical point of view. The eighth and ninth days of the autumnal pūjā are those of the fifteenth of the bright half of the month of Āśvin, while here the eighth and ninth days of the festival are not determined by the moon, but by the day of the week: the eighth day (like the first) must be a Tuesday, the day consecrated to the Goddess (following the solar calendar of the south).

Then on the morning of the ninth day there is a theatrical performance with dancing, accompanied by singing to the goddess, called strangely *cella-piḷḷai,* literally "dear child." According to the *Tamil Lexicon* (s.v.), the technical sense of this dramaturgical term is "the second role in a comedy, which is supposed to have originally been a representation of Skanda." There can be no question here of Subrahmaṇya-Skanda, who it seems is Maṅgalanāyakī's older brother. But during the performance, which puts ten to fifteen persons on stage near the temple chariot, the executioner—who attends as a spectator—enters into trance. He must be conveyed into the temple, where he will be kept until the first sacrifice. According to the villagers, the executioner is a Piḷḷaimār, while the zamindar identifies him only as a *kēḍāveṭṭi* (?), which makes the identification very difficult. According to Thurston,[5] the executioner would be an Uḍaiyāṉ, with traits that would make the Uḍaiyāṉs comparable to the Maṟavars farther south; but Thurston confuses the executioner and the priest, a confusion that, at least today, is no longer possible, since the priest is a vegetarian. The only thing locally certain is that the role is hereditary within one and the same lineage, and that the caste to which it belongs does not eat buffalo meat. Before proceeding, one should note the duality of the Paṟaiyar and the hereditary executioner: whereas the former remains mute beneath the śamī after having completed his tour of the villages with the sacrificial weapon, the latter is the man who gets possessed (the Pot-rāj of Mahārāṣṭra was both). It is clear enough that the Paṟaiyar is identified with the sacrificial weapon that remains at rest beneath the śamī until the time to act has come. In other words, the śamī and the Paṟaiyar are associated in one and the same role, of which the victim is the unperceived component (eating buffalo meat, the Paṟaiyar recognizes himself in the buffalo). As for the executioner, we do not know if he is possessed by the goddess or by . . . Mahiṣa, whom is nowhere mentioned: perhaps he is the cella-piḷḷai who gives his name to the theatrical performance? The entire mythical side of the ceremony eludes us. But it is likely that the Paṟaiyar beneath the śamī and the executioner are the actors of a single action divided in two parts, in which the former assumes a role in the preparatory latent phase (in the manner of the post of Pōtu Rāju), not without identifying himself with the silent and devoted victim, facing the temple and near the stone posts, while the latter takes the part of the goddess (here Kālī) who slays demons.

[5]Thurston 1909, vol. 7, s.v. Udaiyān: 208 ff. They would perhaps be identical with the Vēṭṭuvars, who are hunters (ibid., 394). A *kiṭāveṭṭi* would be "the one who cuts the sacrificial animal."

When the performance has ended, the seven buffalo are tied to seven posts and the executioner, on his own, leaves the temple to accomplish his task. All the utsavamūrtis have been taken out and carried to the chariot (located on the right side of the temple in relation to the tree couple). Only Kālī attends the sacrifice before joining the others on the tēr. The executioner first decapitates the goats (we note once again the sequence goat-buffalo), then the seven buffalo. They are left on the ground as they are until the sacrifices have ended. The chariot then leaves in procession through the streets of Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam, with Maṅgalanāyakī at the center of the utsavamūrtis. It is a long and wearisome march through the seven villages and can last two or three days. When the tēr returns to the temple, always to the same place at the side of, and at a distance from, the sacrificial site, seven other buffalo are immolated, having been preceded by goats. The Paṟaiyars share the fourteen buffalo among themselves (no details were given concerning the distribution of the goats, but there are hardly any vegetarians among the participants), while the coins that had been tied to their horns at their consecration go to the executioner. The processional statues are left on the chariot until the following day, allowing devotees to pay them homage. Finally, on the evening of the tenth day all the mūrtis go out on a palanquin into Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam and the inhabitants sprinkle them with turmeric water. It is just prior to this last procession that the gurukkaḷ and the "Harijan" introduced earlier remove their kāppus, the duties of both having ended. The festival comes to an end with the return of the palanquin and its mūrtis to the temple on the same evening.

The zamindar has not only presided over the festival's important moments, but also attended to its entire organization. His royal role is made more explicit on two occasions. It is he who pays for the fifth day's expenses, covering the goddess's visit to her native village (for the rest, the temple has its own income). It is all as if Maṅgalanāyakī were the local chief's kuladevī, linking him especially to Puvanūr village. But this is only a reproduction on the local scale of a schema valid for a royal dynasty: the protective goddess always retains her ties to her temple of origins. It would appear that the utmost has been done here to organize the kinship ties between the deity and the vicinity, and, among the seven villages brought together in the cult, only those that are thus linked with her are visited. A second royal characteristic is regularly associated with the head of a local collectivity assembled for a festival. If the zamindar has himself consecrated a buffalo to the goddess in the course of the year, his is the first to be sacrificed, and there is apparently no question of not choosing it and selling it instead. Correlatively, the tēr procession between the two series of sacrifices is such that it becomes both a victorious war expedition and a triumphal visit by the divine sovereign to her States. One is also not surprised to see here once again that ultimate vestige of the aśvamedha, which seems to be the wandering of the consecrated buffalo while awaiting the sacrifice. The residue of the schema of this royal sacrifice par excellence is apparent through the scarcely indicated myth of the warrior goddess. But in this instance the goddess's ambiguity has disappeared. Kālī, who elsewhere (notably in Kongunad) fulfills the function of boundary goddess and slayer of buffalo, is alone in her contact with the immolation of the victims. Maṅgalanāyakī wishes to know nothing of what takes place. It is as always the goddess's double who substitutes for her as she dissociates herself from the process of putting to death, even though the latter is not suppressed.

Here, the autumnal Navarātri seems to go unnoticed. As for Vijayādaśamī, its celebration is very similar to what takes place nearly everywhere in Tamilnadu. On the evening of that day, the processional mūrti of Maṅgalanāyakī—the vegetarian goddess—is taken in a palanquin to the base of the platform encircling the pipal and the śamī. A young banana tree is planted near the śamī, and the gurukkaḷ, acting on the part of the goddess, shoots three arrows at it. The description of this rite is not accompanied by any commentary; it is not certain that the participants perceive the connection between the banana tree and the vaṉṉimaram, or that the latter's proximity would signify anything. But if we recall the Harijan's long stay during the festival at the base of the śamī, which is also the site of the buffalo sacrifices, it does not seem at all rash to ascribe to the tree an asuric, or in any case inferior, status. The pipal, on the other hand, has no explicit role in the ritual, and its association with the śamī is not a matter of local comment. The most current Vijayādaśamī ritual in Tamilnadu is thus simply repeated. It is as though the presence of a standing śamī—which was no doubt originally intended and explained in one way or another—has stemmed any symbolic interpretation of the ritual.

Be that as it may, the observer cannot forget that the pipal and the śamī form a couple and that this couple has from an early date evoked the araṇis (above, pp. 52 ff.) and, therewith, fire. In Āndhra this association is explicitly sustained in the Pōtu Rāju installed beneath a pipal at the center of the village, the Pōtu Rāju itself being made of śamī wood. Whether the pipal is alone or coupled with a margosa, the symbolism of the araṇis and of the fire that issues from them remains present. But the śamī on its own, that mother of the pipal, and thus of fire, evokes fire directly. It remains to show that the passage from the one to the other can occur in diverse forms.

B. The Fire: Demon, Torture, Funeral Pyre

Contrary to what is generally believed, the buffalo sacrifice did not come forth indissolubly linked with the *Devī-māhātmya,* even though the latter remains its most "brahmanical"—that is to say, Sanskrit and thus rightly pan-Indian—mythical expression. On reflection, the practice of the buffalo sacrifice must have long preceded such a carefully worked out text in which the Buffalo and the Goddess multiply themselves at will. V. S. Agrawala (1963, vii) aptly points out that the Goddess's beheading of the anthropomorphic asura issuing from the body of a buffalo—such as described in DM—does not appear in iconography before the Gupta period (fourth century AD). Representations from the Kuṣān period (first and second centuries AD) show the goddess engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the buffalo, strangling or suffocating it with one hand, breaking its back with the other. This appears to be a quite suggestive plastic replica of what could be expected from the Vedic ritual about putting an animal victim to death.[6] When she appears in the MBh, the Goddess is already fond of buffalo blood.

[6]Or better yet, a reproduction of scenes in which the epic Bhīma kills his asuric victims outside the battle (MBh 1.154.24-32 [142.24-30]; 1.163.25-28 [151.21-24]; 2.24.5-7 [22.5-7]; 3.11.61-66 [12.61-66]; 4.22.74-83 [21.58 App. I No. 24, lines 1-19, 59-60]).

The *Harivaṃśa,* which gives the first myth of the Goddess's birth, makes no mention of the Buffalo, although it alludes to her penchant for meat and alcohol offerings (2.3.12 [App. I No. 8, line 19 with variations]). It is probable that the myths and ritual practices of the buffalo sacrifice were formed and diversified over centuries, without leaving precise traces other than those of an iconographic nature. But it would also appear that they did not develop outside the milieus in which brahmanical knowledge, in the widest sense of the term, took hold. As regards the popularity of the DM, it seems to have been confined to the north, and perhaps above all to Bengal, which has provided a number of commentaries on it. All one actually knows about the buffalo sacrifice in south India shows not only that it ignores the DM,[7] but that the myths which serve to decipher the ritual of the goddesses do not know Mahiṣāsura. Even in Maisūr (Mysore), at the time of the rāja and his pomp, the Durgāpūjā was just as grandiose as in the north, and one knew that the eighth day fell on Kālarātri, the night when the Goddess slew Mahiṣāsura;[8] but the DM was not among the texts recited at that time. One contented oneself with *stotra*s enumerating the Goddess's names. Elsewhere, it is Mahiṣāsura himself who seems to be unknown, even if he is everywhere present. We have seen the myth of Reṇukā come to the surface in the rituals celebrated around the buffalo sacrifice, mixed with the myth from Karṇāṭaka (which is perhaps only a much transformed popular variant of it) in which a young Brahman girl is married to a man who, without her knowing it, is of low caste and an eater of buffalo meat. The mythical foundation of the goddesses in Āndhra is much more multiform and has become hardly recognizable in relation to the classical models. Pōtu Rāju has also irretrievably lost his Buffalo identity, not to speak of his heir Pōtta Rājā at Draupadī temples, to whom the buffalo sacrifice is not even known. In Tamilnadu, we have seen in two instances—at the Cantaveḷiyamman̲ temple in Kāñcī (above, p. 115) and in Rāmanāthapuram in the context of Vijayādaśamī (above, p. 116)—the idea that the goddess has slain Mahiṣa in the form of a van̲nimaram. But in the latter case at least, the information comes exclusively from the royal family of Ramnad (Mar̲avar), which is in direct contact with the Sanskrit tradition through its *purohita*s and, more recently, through the monastery of the Śaṅkarācārya of Śriṅgeri. One sees here and there a Magiḍāsuran̲ or Maguḍāsuran̲ in human form represented in bas-relief on the pedestal of the goddess's statue, or one hears that the goddess slew Magiḍāsuran̲ (notably in Tirunelveli) or Magi l̲āsuran̲ at Kṣetrapālapuram (above, p. 135, n. 56). But for the Tamil ear, this name does not in

[7]In fact, an examination of rituals in north India would perhaps lead to some revisions: the *Candīpāṭha* (recitation of the DM) takes place during the autumnal Durgāpūjā and temporary effigies of the Goddess, which at that time are very prevalent, represent her as slayer of the asuric Buffalo. But the festival of the village goddess takes place, as in the south, in the first part of the year, and it is generally at this time that the buffalo sacrifice occurs, in the absence of the Candīpāṭha. However, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1952, 63-72), describes a buffalo sacrifice for the autumnal Durgāpūjā. It is impossible to know whether the texts recited are related to the (Bengali) DM, and whether the festival, domestic in appearance, concerns the whole locality.

[8]Cf. Rao 1921, 305. No precision is given concerning the mode of celebration at the Cāmuṇḍā temple in Maisūr itself, where the only sure thing is that there is no buffalo sacrificed. The author seems to be unaware that buffalo were sacrificed not far from there, but very much removed from royal display, even though the rāja would have had to attend. The practice has continued.

any way evoke the buffalo, much less Mahiṣa. It is that of an asura like others, and they are legion. Maharashtrians, on the other hand, have no difficulty recognizing Mahiṣa in Mhasobā; the Mahār and Māṅg castes have a special relationship with him.

Better still, the buffalo sacrifice can receive an entirely new mythical expression. The ritual in Ambakarattūr (Pondicherry State) has already been mentioned (above, p. 177, n. 119) in connection with the aśvamedha vestiges located in Kongunad. It was renowned for its buffalo sacrifice, which took place on the eighth day of the annual festival in Vaikāci for Aṣṭabhujakālī, Kālī with eight arms. It is again a question of a boundary goddess (this time in the west) whose temple faces north. Her sanctuary is flanked by a secondary shrine that includes mūrtis of Kālī's bhaktas. Facing east is a Pettaraṇiyacāmi or Pettaperumāḷ. His name is not so well established,[9] but the arivāḷ in his right hand, cekkumāndaḍi in his left, and dagger beneath his belt would make him a perfect Kaṟuppu. As if he were Kālī's guardian, his processional icon accompanies her on her first outing in the village on the initial day of the festival. Facing south is a niche for Pēcciyamman̲. She disembowels a child on her knees and her feet stand on an asura: Maguḍāsuran̲. In any case, there is something related to the Buffalo in this subshrine. The festival lasts in principle for fifteen days, beginning on a Tuesday. The first week is occupied mainly with processions of Kālī's utsavamūrti around the village on different vāhanas, while the Māriyamman̲ festival goes on at the settlement's center. During the buffalo sacrifice on the eighth day, buffalo are brought by devotees (who also bring cocks and goats), but a single buffalo is sacrificed (replaced today by a lemon cut in two and thrown in the air). To choose the buffalo, all the animals are driven into the neighboring tank (always water), and the one that comes out first has been chosen by the goddess. The others are sold. The buffalo is immolated by Pettaperumāḷ's priest, a Piḷḷai, with the god's arivāḷ, and then buried in a hole dug facing the Kālī shrine with its four feet in the air. The four hooves are allowed to protrude somewhat to prevent anyone walking on the site. After a few days, the hooves disappear in the earth, bringing the interdiction to an end. Why this precaution? It is because the buffalo is the incarnation of Ambasuran̲, who had two brothers, Ambakan̲ and Ambalakan̲ (or Ambalikan̲).

One thus observes here an explicit dissociation of the asura represented by the buffalo from the Mahiṣa of the classical myth, who reappears clandestinely in the form of Maguḍāsuran̲. But according to the *sthalapurāṇa,* the pīṭha before which the buffalo is sacrificed is called Mahiṣāpīṭha precisely because of this putting to death of the buffalo.[10] If it were to turn out that Pettaperumāḷ is Kaṟuppu, there would be a remarkable convergence between the "crypto-Buffalo" and the buffalo sacrificed by the arivāḷ, which Pettaperumāḷ's priest uses to immolate the victim. But most significantly, the

[9]The *sthalapurāna (Ampakarattūrt-talapurānam)* calls him Pettārnar or Pettārnyacuvāmi, which is no longer clear (according to the *Tamil Lexicon* [2861], *pettam* < Skt. *baddha*). Should one see here an extreme deformation of Pōtta Rājā? The same text, concerned to give an etymology for Ambakarattūr, introduces two asuras, Ambaran̲ and Amban̲.

[10]Apparently the author of the sthalapurāna knows more than the informants of the temple, in this case the pūcāris. There is no rapport between the myth, which is moreover very stereotyped, and the unfolding of the ritual. But the oral information on the three asuras seems better to the extent that it can be compared with other findings.

reinterpretation of the buffalo-victim is borrowed from the most brahmanical tradition there could be. Here, even beyond the resurgence of an aśvamedha schema, one is tempted to observe that only Ambasuraṉ is slain, while his brothers apparently escape. There is thus a difference in the treatment of the three asuras that one could relate to the epic schema. In the MBh, only the eldest of the three daughters of the King of Kāśī, Ambā, refuses to marry the dharmic king because she is engaged to an asura, her choice sufficing to make her asuric. She incarnates the Earth that goes astray, making her the counterpart of Bhīṣma's unpardonable renunciation of the throne. Her sisters Ambikā and Ambālikā marry the husband given them by Bhīṣma, his own half-brother who has become heir of the lunar dynasty. In addition, the names suggest a relationship between the Goddess and the asura, for the former is called Ambikā as in the DM.

One thus faces a situation in which the myth of the Goddess who slays the Buffalo demon and the ritual culminating in the buffalo sacrifice have evolved separately and eventually in a divergent manner. The passage from Indo-Aryan to Dravidian languages does not explain everything. More likely than not, the name Pōta Rāju is not a product of chance. It is a kind of translation of Mahiṣāsura. Must one say the same of Māḍaṉ and Kaṟuppu? It would be tempting. Conversely, is there a necessary relationship between the narrative—late—of the DM and the buffalo sacrifice, even in the rare places where they develop in parallel? In contrast, for instance, to the Draupadī ritual in which episodes of the epic are enacted at the same time as they are recounted, the *Caṇḍīpāṭha* in the north is recited in its entirety each day of the festival. No effort is made to establish a correspondence between the Goddess's victory over Mahiṣāsura and the buffalo's immolation. At the same time as one observes the reciprocal divergence of the myth and the rite, one is struck by the pan-Indian permanence of the buffalo sacrifice and its relationship to the Goddess's cult. There is a necessity for this sacrifice in which the ubiquity of the symbols of sacrifice is reinforced by a paradigmatic constellation formed around the buffalo as such. In Kongunad, in a cultic ensemble where both the royal aśvamedha ritual and the myth of Reṇukā show through at the same time, it is in particular an aspect of the symbolism of the buffalo that must have permitted the substitution—today, at least, entirely unconscious—of Kārtavīrya for the Buffalo asura who becomes a post. Probably the well-known association of the buffalo with muddy water and the qualification of Kārtavīrya as king of the marshy zones played a significant role, and largely explains the significance of water in the ritual. But if this feature could assume such a semantic importance, it is because it is itself "marked." In its context it is a vector of inferiority, of devaluation, of loss of status, and its significance remains the same in the rite and the myth because it falls within the province of a general taxonomy. The marshes or the dense and humid forest where the wild buffalo roams are opposed to the dry and salubrious regions, to the jāṅgala, of which the Kurujāṅgala of the epic is the archetype.[11]

Correlatively, the Goddess is necessarily the slayer of the Buffalo demon: it is the very conception of her role that is at stake. Fundamentally, the Goddess, and the epic princesses who represent her under different names (the asuric Ambā, Draupadī the

[11]Zimmermann 1982, 7-8.

incarnation of Śrī, or Subhadrā the sister of Kṛṣṇa) are faced with the essential Darkness which, were it not overcome and confined to its proper bounds, would destroy the world and become Evil. Yet at the same time one cannot do without it and must give it its place and a positive role: that of an inferior guardian deity of the Goddess in the temple, a sacrificial victim offered to the Goddess in the cult. If the buffalo sacrifice could be integrated with diverse mythic complexes, it is precisely because of the homology such complexes have among themselves, as has already been noted. They have but one and the same thing to express, even if they do it in different registers: disorder in the upper varṇas, war between the gods and asuras, the sacrificial fire stick and burning the world. Whatever the "origin" of the myth and the rite, the structure that unites them is already present in the epic, even though one is not able to specify the concrete modalities: it belongs to the vaster structure that comes to be named Hinduism. It is thus idle to speculate abstractly about the relations between myth and rite. These links are embedded in each local actualization. They are without doubt temporally limited and always revert to a more englobing and deeper reality where values are at stake.

The permanence and fundamental character of this structure uniting the Goddess and the buffalo sacrifice accounts at the same time for a surprising unity in the liturgical calendar throughout India, at least as concerns the Goddess. In south India, as in the north, goddesses have their festivals in the first part of the year, beginning much earlier than, but including, the hot months,[12] while the autumnal Durgāpūjā is also known from north to south. In north India, it can eventually be associated with the buffalo sacrifice—notably at the royal level in Rājasthān—or simply celebrated in commemoration of the Goddess's victory over Mahiṣāsura. Already there, however, and notwithstanding the unequivocal character of the representations of the Goddess as slayer of the buffalo (Mahiṣamardinī), Bengal and its diaspora double this victory with that of Rāma over Rāvaṇa. Strangely, the collective consciousness does not seem to perceive the connection between the festivities centered on the Goddess and the Rāma-līlā, a daily presentation of episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that culminates on the tenth day with a bonfire fueled solely by a large effigy representing Rāvaṇa. Let us note that the fire is thereby introduced in commemoration of a war, whether in connection with the buffalo sacrifice or not. For the link exists between the two series of events, and south India, forgetful of Mahiṣāsura, provides the most certain testimony of this (below, pp. 291-93). It is the Goddess who gave victory to Rāma, and the sacrifice of Rāvaṇa doubles that of the Buffalo. Beyond the purāṇic world fire, the cosmic night that ensues, and the renewal of

[12]Cf. Beck 1981, table on p. 103, on the high percentage of festivals to the Goddess during the hot months. The problem can be viewed differently and I refer once again to Nicholas 1981 (above, p. 100, n. 56) who has given an excellent description of the relationship of diseases, of which the village goddess would be the specialist, with the general world order (p. 36): "Famine, disease, and rapacious tax-collectors are seen as connected to one another—and, at a certain level, as naturalistically connected. That is, the links between low rainfall and low rice harvest, low rice harvest and increase in the proportion extracted as revenue, increase in revenue and diminution in nutrition, reduced diet and increased disease are all clearly made by ordinary people. . . . But what they add up to is more than the sum of the parts, often dramatically characterized as the cataclysmic end of the present cosmic epoch (*yugāntara* or even *manvantara*), when chaos and universal destruction reign. Behind such widespread distress lies the general sinfulness of human beings, who neglect their gods and their dharma."

a dharmic world that it promises, the fire on the last day thus has a rapport with the offering fire of the Vedic sacrifice.

It is, in fact, south India that makes this reading of the northern celebrations possible. Here there is no Rāma-līlā; no longer is Rāvaṇa reduced to ashes, and the Durgāpūjā is usually confined to its tenth day, Vijayādaśamī. The retention of the name Vijayādaśamī clearly indicates that the same festival takes place in both north and south, and that it is linked to the Goddess's victory. But any recollection of Mahiṣāsura has, without exception, disappeared. Yet one will at least detect his presence in symbolic surrogates where the śamī plays the foremost role and, correlatively, the fire. The date of the autumnal Durgāpūjā is more firmly established (the first ten of the fifteen bright nights of Āśvin) than the timing of village festivals spread over the first months of the year. From the start, then, Durgāpūjā appears to be linked to the ensemble of Hinduism as a comprehensive structure, notwithstanding the major differences in the ways it is celebrated. This would perhaps explain why the festival is not completely foreign to local cults, and how it may bring an independent symbolism into play. To the very extent that one thought to have detected brahmanical pan-Indian symbols in the cults of village goddesses, it is, on the contrary, normal to find significant correspondences between the two groups of Goddess festivals. One would, perhaps, have hardly discovered them had one not begun with Pōtu Rāju.

1. The Demon Vanni

The situation is at first sight quite paradoxical: Tamilnadu on the whole ignores Mahiṣāsura, although this would not always have been the case, since here and there one finds Maguḍas/Magiḍas/Magilas who are recollections of him. In most of this region, the buffalo sacrifice was also perhaps never linked to the cult of local goddesses, as it is in Āndhra or even in Kongunad (where, however, the festival combines several units of settlement). Correlatively, the Durgāpūjā does not mobilize an entire population as it does in the north, particularly in Bengal (but also in the large cities of Mahārāṣṭra such as Puṇe or Ṣoḷāpur). However, the tenth day of the festival, Vijayādaśamī, does not go unnoticed and, broadly speaking, it can be said that on this day the victory of the goddess over Vanniyasuran is celebrated, and that the principal rite is the Vanniyasura-saṃhāra, the putting to death of the demon Vanni. Fortunately, we have several of the intermediary links that facilitate the passage. Many know—for instance the royal family of Rāmanāthapuram, the gurukkaḷ of Cantaveḷiyamman in Kāñcipuram,[13] or again, gurukkaḷs in Kongunad—that during the battle between the Goddess and Mahiṣāsura, the latter entered into a vanni tree, or took the form of a vanni. But they give no scriptural reference for this. Moreover, rather than mention Vanniyasuran, they prefer to call the rite *ambu-pōḍudal,* the "shooting of arrows." They know nothing of the reasons for this transformation of the Buffalo into a vanni. The gurukkaḷs at Samayapuram go one step further by totally occulting the Buffalo in order to substitute a Nimbāsura for him; when

[13]It is to be noted that this gurukkal succeeded a Vanniyar priest in the service of a goddess whose devotees are mostly Vanniyars: there is a kind of tacit law according to which the presence of Vanniyars as the dominant caste in a given place excludes the presence of a Vanniyasuran. Cf. below, p. 275.

slain by Māriyammaṉ, he enters a vaṉṉimaram (above, p. 255). Thus a new link emerges, since one knows the double association of the neem and the śamī with Pōtu Rāju in Āndhra, and since we have every reason to suppose that the margosa is a substitute for the śamī. But not without a paradox to reflect the śamī's ambiguity: in its association with the goddess of disease the neem brings coolness, extinguishing the fire of fever; but "etymologically," *vaṉṉimaram* in Tamil can be associated only with fire. Māriyammaṉ's gurukkaḷs have undoubtedly lost the trace of Mahiṣa, but the coolness of the neem could be another souvenir of the buffalo's fondness for water. The transformation is thus doubly subtle and illuminating.

When we move away from learned gurukkaḷs, we soon come to Vaṉṉiyasuraṉ. At Taccanallūr (Tirunelveli Dt. and Tk.), Vijayādaśamī is understood as the slaying by the local goddess (Ekkāḷadēviyammaṉ) of Maguḍāsuraṉ, who is represented by a banana tree and mango-tree foliage. But this Maguḍa does not evoke Mahiṣa in Tamil, not even for the Kambar priest, from a caste of temple musicians. Yet let us note in passing this extremely uncommon feature: after the arrows have been shot, the faithful offer votive sacrifices to Maguḍāsuraṉ. What is rare is not the offering to a demon, nor the transition from demon status to that of an inferior deity, but the clear manifestation of this passage, the laying bare of the process of conversion. An asura is slain and is offered victims immediately after its own immolation. An apparently original variant is also known in Māyuram (Tanjavur Dt.): at the Śiva temple there, one celebrates the *Vallāḷakaṇḍasura-saṃhāra,* the killing of three brothers named Vallāḷakaṇḍasuraṉ, Nīlakaṇḍasuraṉ, and Iḍumbakaṇḍasuraṉ (in whom I believe we can recognize Iḍumbaṉ, the asura-devotee of Subrahmaṇya, with the ending *-kaṇṭaṉ* having probably been transferred to the other two brothers from Nīlakaṇḍaṉ-Nīlakaṇṭha, an epithet of Śiva!). *Vallāḷaṉ* (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 3529) is an approximate equivalent of *vīraṉ,* but could indeed also be the literal translation of Mahiṣa, "the Mighty One."[14] No doubt one could find other variants, indeed, veritable windfalls of fabulation in which the hidden significance would still be discernible. But it is nonetheless Vaṉṉiyasuraṉ who is commonly accepted as the demon at Vijayādaśamī.

There is no need to dwell upon the ritual,[15] which, notwithstanding its variant details and occasional royal pomp, is simple and can be reduced to a few constant features. The demon, whatever his name, is represented by branches of vaṉṉimaram together with a young banana tree. Or the vaṉṉi may be absent, in which case the banana tree alone represents the demon, whatever may be the reasons for the vaṉṉi's exclusion, and even if the demon is named Vaṉṉiyasuraṉ. On the other hand, at Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam one targets a banana tree that is added to a still living śamī. It thus seems that the association between the two would be significant, and that the banana tree does not figure as a mere substitute for the vaṉṉi. If the rite can also be called ambu-pōḍudal, the "shooting of

[14]The information comes from the Māriyammaṉ temple in Tirunaṉriyūr (above, pp. 137 ff.), where the pūcāri is a Vaṉṉiyar in a practically monocaste (Vaṉṉiyar) locality.

[15]Regarding this point, cf. Biardeau 1981a, 228-29. This article makes use of information gathered in the field up to 1978, whereas the present work takes 1980 and 1981 fieldwork into consideration. The contradictions that arise between the article and this study negate certain assertions made in the former that are revised on the basis of further observations and other sources of information.

arrows," it is because the "killing" is executed with a bow and arrows—whose distant resemblance to real weapons only attests to the rite's symbolic character. Sometimes five arrows are shot, four in the cardinal directions and one at the banana tree next to the śamī, while at other times one and the same arrow is shot five times, and this is done as if one were to let the arrow fly so as to immediately retrieve it. Generally a gurukkaḷ wields the bow, but he can also initiate the shooting of a series of arrows, passing on the bow to a succession of local notables.

There is a last important feature to be noted. It is not always the goddess whom the priest represents in the putting to death, and the festival is not always situated in a goddess temple. In any case, the "killing" itself usually takes place at a distance from any temple or settlement, but the rite is attached to the temple of either Subrahmaṇya or Perumāḷ—that is, in fact, Rāma. Even at Puttūr (above, p. 122), where the saṃhāra, "destruction," takes place in the Māriyamman̲ temple's courtyard, the van̲ni branches are brought from a tree located at the Subrahmaṇya temple, and it is a gurukkaḷ who performs the rite. It is not certain whether he represents the goddess whom he serves as priest, or Subrahmaṇya who is also served by a gurukkaḷ. In Kongunad, the situation is even clearer: at Cen̲nimalai, the putting to death takes place before the Pirāttiyamman̲ temple, but it is a Subrahmaṇya on horseback—more precisely, the processional mūrti of Muttukumārasvāmin mounted on a wooden horse—who is sent from the Kailāsanātha temple. Muttukumārasvāmin is the only form of Subrahmaṇya who, in the double temple of the mountain at Cen̲nimalai (above, pp. 155 ff.) would be associated with his two wives. A royal god must draw the bow, not an ascetic. Pirāttiyamman̲ receives a pūjā just before the rite, which can be a way of saying that the goddess is associated with it. At Civan̲malai, the same ceremony takes place near the hilltop temple, that of Subrahmaṇya, and it is again Muttukumārasvāmin, this time accompanied by his wives, who is the archer. We find the same thing at Uttukuḷi (Periyar Dt., Perundurai Tk.), where there is also a double temple. It is likely that it is the same situation at all the sites of the region centered on a mountain with a double temple. At Dhārāpuram, on the other hand, the role of archer is given to Rāma in the form of Kalyāṇarāma, Rāma provided with a wife, in the presence of the processional mūrtis of Śiva and his wife.

There is an obvious connection between the change of agents and the exclusive use of the bow and arrows. Even if the latter figure among the display of weapons of the goddess with eight or ten arms, they are not the ones that the iconography would lend her in her encounter with Mahiṣa, that is, the triśūla to overpower the Buffalo, and the sword to decapitate the warrior then rising from its buffalo body. The bow and arrows are the weapons of the noblest warrior, the royal warrior who is also a hunter. The case at Pa̲la̲ni is very suggestive in this regard. Muttukumārasvāmin, again at this Subrahmaṇya site par excellence, receives the vēl from his mother with the mission to slay Van̲niyasura̲n. The vēl is Subrahmaṇya's weapon, and its form, as already noted, approaches that of Pōtu Rāju and the yūpa. In addition, it is the central element of the triśūla such as it is represented throughout this region (plate 85). Now the vēl that he brings with him in procession only assists in the putting to death (like the yūpa in the sacrifice). The god himself prefers the bow and arrows.

It is not possible within the frame of this study to thoroughly consider the problem presented by this displacement. The Goddess seems to become more distant at the same

time as the Buffalo. But what remains from her festival and her victory? Here, we are obviously tempted to see a kind of rivalry, or redundancy, between the sovereign god or avatāra and the Goddess,[16] since even during her festival, the Goddess is deprived of her victory to a god's advantage. The case of Subrahmaṇya is doubly complicated, since the epic already makes Mahiṣa his adversary (MBh 3.223 ff. [213 ff.] and 9.46 [45]), and because he is considered as the son of Śiva and his wife. But the choice of Rāma as the other actor helps to clarify the status of the vanquisher of Mahiṣa. Rāma, above all in his role as contented husband (so unepical!), is the figure of the king par excellence.[17] And Subrahmaṇya must also have a royal status and be provided with wives in order to vanquish Mahiṣa (in the rite). That is why at Rāmanāthapuram, for example, it is Rājarājeśvarī, the protective goddess of the royal dynasty, who assumes the task of slaying Mahiṣa herself. It is not the Goddess as such who is disqualified, but rather the village goddesses with whom this study is concerned. To be sure, in her cult, which is intended to ensure the protection of the village as a unit of habitation, she appears as a sovereign (more as a sovereign victim than triumphant), but the bounds of her power are those of the village. The Goddess of the Durgāpūjā and of Vijayādaśamī, on the contrary, has been delegated by the sovereign gods to ensure the protection of the entire world. Thus the consorts of the great gods are equally disqualified, since the warrior goddess is a virgin.[18] But this Goddess quite naturally incarnates herself in the kuladevī of royal dynasties, since each king, whatever the extent of his kingdom, must protect all the worlds—in fact, the integrity of dharma, which has no territorial frontiers. The link between the goddess of Vijayādaśamī and kingship comes out in the ritual through a simulation of battle: sometimes the crowd rushes to the banana tree and vanni to obtain a few luck-bringing bits, producing a boisterous and joyful fray, or sometimes there is scuffling to get hold of the equally auspicious arrows. Children, of course, provide most of the troops.[19]

But what about the vanni-banana "couple" that represents the asura? The vanni must certainly have been chosen according to the function it fulfills farther to the north, along the eastern coast, under the form of Pōtu Rāju. Telugu enables a certain transparency of the Vedic symbolism through the similitude of names: in Āndhra, Sanskrit *śamī* becomes *dzammi* (Brown 1980, 477). Yet the same language has also played against the recognition of Mahiṣa in Pōtu Rāju, in contrast to what one can more easily discern in the name Mhasobā, in Mahārāṣṭra. The śamī, as we have seen (above, pp. 47 ff.), harks back to the kindling sticks of the Vedic sacrifice, and has kept, in its use as the material for the post-god guardian of the boundary goddess, something of its function as "mother of fire," along with all the ambiguity thus entailed: it can keep fire in its womb in a

[16]Something of this rivalry already appeared in the double subordination of Māḍaṉ and Karuppu to a god and a goddess.

[17]See below on the mythical aspects of the śamīpūjā.

[18]This has already raised a number of problems concerning Reṇukā-Māriyammaṉ, and we shall again face this question, which is symmetrical with that of the ascetic and warrior god.

[19]We find this feature again in the śamīpūjā (below, p. 288), but also in the buffalo sacrifice (at Durgāpūjā) in Rājasthān, where it becomes in places an exercise of skill in which Rājpūt youths rival each other on horseback.

latent state, and can also give it life by the well-regulated use of the firesticks; but it also has the formidable power to unleash it, which it does symbolically in the village, for example in a period of epidemic fever. This ambiguity admirably manifests that of the goddess with her guardian and younger brother. The Tamil vannimaram, however, is much less subtle and nuanced. By way of the "etymology" given its name (< Skt. *vahni*, "fire"), it undoubtedly resumes a portion of the sacrificial symbolism of the śamī of Pōtu Rāju. But it is no more than fire. It has no nuance in meaning other than what is entailed in the sacrificial fire itself: manifestation of the god Agni, that mouth of the gods, it is also the baneful destroyer of the oblations one makes to him, one of the agents of death indispensable for any sacrifice. The vanni is also entirely male, which in a certain way makes it a perfect vīran, but its feminine and humid side—an important characteristic in connection with the Buffalo—disappears. Perhaps it would have been simpler to bypass the vanni and choose neem branches, which so often substitute for the śamī, to represent the asura. The premise is not absurd, since we saw a Nimbasuran emerge in Samayapuram. But in that case, the nimba is precisely the detour toward the vanni, probably intended to make its significance precise, or to insert it in a known symbolic context: Pōtu Rāju, like the goddess, is, in fact, always adorned with neem during festivals, and he takes shelter beneath a neem-pipal couple in the center of the village.

In brief, it seems that if usage of the vanni does indeed draw on the sacrificial significance of fire, this is not something it has done on its own; rather, it probably derives such significance from the Pōtu Rāju of Āndhra. It is one of those disjecta membra that one rediscovers in Tamilnadu. Perhaps, then, we should conceive of its association with the banana tree as a way of partially reconstituting the complexity of the śamī (if not of Pōtu Rāju). It is, in fact, difficult to believe that the tender banana trunk is only there to be shot at with fantasy arrows: one could imagine many possible trajectories for symbolic deadly arrows. We have already seen at Tirunanriyūr (above, pp. 141 ff.) a banana trunk in the position not only of the fire but of the post (as an Agniskambha), and this was on the northeast corner (the direction of sovereignty) of the area for the firewalk. In accounting for this, it was the classical female symbolism of the banana trunk that seemed to be relevant. Here again, Tamil does not afford a direct understanding of the feminine value attached to the Sanskrit *kadalī*. But this sense can be present in many other ways across the (even ancient) Tamil landscape, or also in the literary conventions of the epic, which make it possible to transpose banana trees to inaccessible Himalayan slopes: Bhīma's expedition to Mount Gandhamādana ("that which intoxicates by its fragrance") to comply with Draupadī's capriciousness, and his encounter there with his half-brother Hanumān in a banana tree forest (MBh 3.146 [idem]) is no doubt the best-known example. When Bhīma arrives at the banana forest, he immediately spots flights of aquatic birds and very soon discovers a cooling lake, where he gambols about (ibid., 50-60 [51-55]). Hanumān lives in the midst of this forest (ibid., 65 ff. [59 ff.]), and is determined to block the path to heaven that Bhīma does not have a right to take. In effect, these banana trees make their obligatory appearance on the way to heaven, and Hanumān even tries to convert Bhīma to vegetarianism by offering him fruits (ibid., 95 [81]). The monkey had obtained immortality from Rāma for as long as Rāma's story would be known on earth (3.148.17 [147.37]), and popular Tamil tradition adds that the banana grove was intended to feed him for all that time.

To the banana tree's association with water is thus added the idea of its immortality, each plant engendering its successor before disappearing. It is by way of this aptitude that the Tamil banana tree participates in the femininity of the śamī, with which it is not identical. The main point is that it would be the bearer of fecundity, thus of a happy future. This is also the general significance that leads to the banana tree's association with all domestic and public festivities (Vanniyars, however, replace it with a vanni branch at the time of a marriage!). It thus forms a couple with the vanni in the saṃhāra, "destruction," rite and shares with it the ambiguous status of an inferior demon-deity.

2. The Firewalk and the Goddess Paccai Amman

The firewalk—Tamil tīmidi (*tīmiti*)—is such a well-known and spectacular element of goddess cults in eastern Tamilnadu that it initially appears as an undifferentiated appendix to the ritual proper. Although the firewalk takes place at the end of Draupadī and Māriyamman festivals, the significance of its connection with their cults remains vague. Yet with little risk of deceiving ourselves, we can see in it a form of "torture" to which devotees bound by vows willingly subject themselves. Other rites of "torture," however, seem to have greater specificity. The rite of the ceḍil, by itself, could be analyzed on the basis of the sacrificial post and the mythical background that justifies it: the ceḍil was directly linked with the popular form of the myth of Kāttavarāyan and distantly attached to the horse sacrifice with twenty-one posts that ends Rāma Jāmadagnya's war against the Kṣatriyas. Or in Kongunad, the pūcaṭṭi, the pot containing glowing embers carried by the goddess's priest in trance, or by devotees under vows, was the symbol of the husband (Jamadagni) and secondarily of the son, Brahman warriors whose names evoke the devouring fire of the sacrifice and of war. But when one moves from Draupadī to Māriyamman, or to Paccaivāliyamman, the firewalk is little differentiated. More precisely, it is plausible that the firewalk opened by Draupadī connects itself to the epic war of which she has been the implied heroine. The firewalk connected with Māriyamman is, like the pūcaṭṭi in Kongunad, probably linked with Jāmadagnya's war against the Kṣatriyas, as epic as an episode could be.

The case of Paccai Amman is all the more complicated, since she appears as a popular goddess without clear classical reference—she is only an incarnation of Pārvatī—and because her festival includes important variants when compared with the others.[20] In particular, it is not possible to account for the unfolding of the ritual without focusing on the firewalk from the outset. Moreover, in her temple in Kanniyakōyil, for example, she appears on the boundary of the settlement, complementary to the temple of Māriyamman at the center who, as distinct from Paccai Amman, is worshipped on Vijayādaśamī: that is, the day of Māriyamman's victory over . . . Vaiyisuran, one says at the Paccaivāliyamman temple, while devotees I met at the Māriyamman temple more plausibly reconstitute a Vaicūriyasuran (< Skt. *masūrikā*). *Vaicūri* denotes smallpox and its

[20]Information pertaining to the annual festival was collected in 1980, primarily at three temples to Paccai Amman: in Kanniyakōyil (South Arcot Dt., Cuddalore Tk.), Kuḍikkāḍu (ibid., Panruti Tk.), and Elumeḍu (ibid.). The informants were Vanniyars in Kanniyakōyil, Cempaḍavars (freshwater fisherman who have become weavers) in Kuḍikkāḍu, and Muttarāya Nāyuḍus in Elumeḍu.

pustules (*muttu* <Skt. *mukta*, "pearl," "pustule"). Paccai Amman̲'s annual festival in Āḍi is centered on the firewalk. At the Muttumāriyamman̲ temple in Cittirai, the festival is essentially linked to a form of ceḍil, that of the long needles thrust beneath the skin. The interest, in both cases, is to dissociate the Van̲niyars, devotees of both goddesses, from Agnivīra (above, p. 117, and below) on the one hand, and very probably from Van̲niyasuran̲ on the other. At the Muttumāriyamman̲ temple, all such associations are avoided: the smallpox goddess Muttumāriyamman̲ (but also Reṇukā, since her icon for worship is a severed head) is doubled into both herself and the asura "Smallpox," whom she fights on her devotees' behalf. To analyze the firewalk by reintegrating it into the ensemble of the annual festival, one thus starts out with Paccaivāl̲iyamman̲.

One must, however, quickly attenuate this complementarity between Paccai Amman̲ and Muttumāriyamman̲ in Kan̲niyakōyil, since in this locality, as in Kuḍikkāḍu or El̲umeḍu, the Paccai Amman̲ temple opens to the east, and not, as is normally the case for a boundary goddess, to the north. According to Van̲niyars, Draupadī and Paccai Amman̲ are never found together in the same locality where Van̲niyars are predominant. It is either one or the other who receives worship. The testimony of Van̲niyars is formal on this point. This opens a track on which we might pursue a certain parallelism between these two goddesses, perhaps even a parallelism as concerns their respective links to fire.

In the relatively circumscribed area of the Tamil countryside where they are found (it is likely that there are also some in North Arcot District), Paccaivāl̲iyamman̲ temples are quite spectacular.[21] Even in places where they are concealed by a copse that cuts them off from the road, the brick or terra-cotta statues that surround the sanctuaries attract attention by their imposing (and variable) dimensions, as well as by their periodically brightened up medley of colors (plates 44, 45, 46). Since each place of this goddess's worship includes, with but few variants, nearly the same elements, an anonymous schema will suffice to give an idea of the features that are most indispensable (see fig. 9).

The munis and the vīra who has become the goddess's guardian shape an enclosure in what is otherwise an open space. Other personages can also figure there: Kuṟavars, who refer to the mountain-dwelling caste of Vaḷḷi, second wife of Subrahmaṇya, can for example face the munis. Agnivīra's brothers can flank him. An elephant can double the horse facing Vāl̲umuni, etc.

In comparison to the goddesses studied up to now, the explicit identification of Paccai Amman̲ and Pārvatī is initially troubling. It is all the more so since Pārvatī is seldom seen in a dominant position in a Paccaivāl̲iyamman̲ temple, where only a small chapel is consecrated to an anthropomorphic form of Śiva called Man̲n̲ārsvāmi or Man̲n̲āda-svāmi, which places him in a subordinate position. This chapel is always on a raised base with three or five steps. As regards Subrahmaṇya, his presence, at least in the form of a processional mūrti in which he is together with his two wives, is justified by the

[21]Cf. Biardeau 1967-68 for an initial isolated study of Paccai Amman̲, with which, broadly speaking, I still concur. The few details at variance are perhaps connected with the fact that at that time two other temples were taken into consideration. But in the case of a contradiction, the present version should obviously be retained for now.

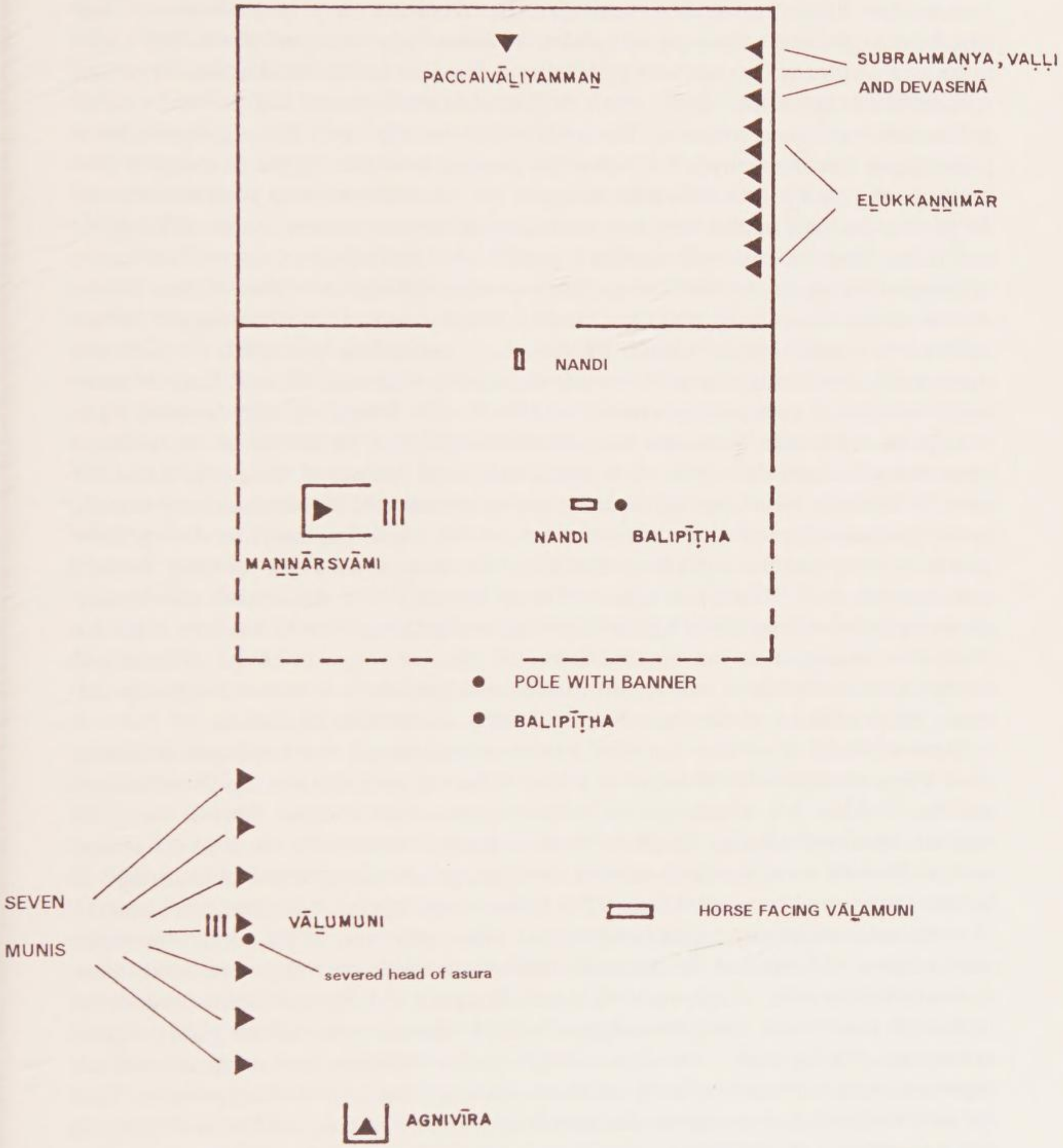

Fig. 9. Schema of the temples of Paccaivāḷiyammaṇ

cult. He happens to have a small adjacent shrine, under the name Muttukumārasvāmi or Daṇḍapāṇi. He is Pārvatī's "son."

Although Vanniyars are not everywhere the dominant caste in possession of the temple, they are everywhere present under the name Paḍaiyāṭci, and retain their claim to being a warrior and royal caste by relating themselves to the Agnikulakṣatriyas: one will recall that the name Vanni, which they bear, is explained by Skt. *vahni* (= *agni*) and makes Agni their ancestor. But what Agni? In any case, this Agni assumes a predominant role in the myth.[22] Whether the goddess is assailed by the seven vīras who begrudge her beauty, or whether the desire to rob her of her magical powers motivates the theft of her cult implements, Paccai Amman is taken unawares in the midst of her devotions. Unable to call on Śiva, who is too absorbed in his yoga, she appeals to Viṣṇu for help, although no one thinks of specifying that he is her own brother. Viṣṇu, unable to take on the vīras alone, who have already defeated Indra and Subrahmaṇya, brings forth seven munis, one of whom, Vāḷumuni, is particularly powerful. As they are represented, these munis combine brahmanic, ascetic, and warrior traits. Each of them keeps the head of an asura (the vīra he has killed) either beneath his elbow or his right foot. Most often, only Vāḷumuni has beneath his right foot the head of an asura whose name varies (it is by definition never Agni). But in all variants of the story, six of the seven brothers are killed, and the seventh owes his salvation to his immediate submission to the goddess. Henceforth he obtains a cult in his small sanctuary, in the opposite direction of the goddess and not on the axis of her sanctuary—which probably accords with the presence of Nandin in front of Paccai Amman. Now the seventh vīra is very generally called Akkiṉivīraṉ (Agnivīra), or again Ativīraṉ, probably Sanskrit Adhivīra or Ativīra, in any case, foremost of vīras. He receives votive offerings of meat and alcohol from worshippers, who are themselves nonvegetarians. When such offerings are made, the door to his shrine must be closed and a screen placed before it.

Here suddenly is another Agni, or another of his forms, who is clearly demonic, since Viṣṇu was needed to dislodge him from Indra's heaven and liberate Subrahmaṇya and the Goddess (cf. above, pp. 117-18). Vanniyars do not feel themselves to be demonic when worshipping the great Paccai Amman. However, the ritual of the annual festival (in Āḍi) complicates matters by introducing Subrahmaṇya and his marriage to his two wives as an essential moment. But before considering this festival, the elements of myth and iconography might prompt some initial reflection. If the seven vīras seem to be a matter of "popular" fiction, their confrontation with the seven munis lends them a certain legitimation. We have already met Brahman and warrior munis (essentially Jamadagni and his son Rāma Jāmadagnya) who, however, oppressed the goddess quite as much as did the asuras. The theme of the warrior Brahman now reappears with an important variant in number: there are seven, although one will be more powerful than the others (it is before him alone that an offering stone is placed, and he is so tall that it is necessary to climb several steps to reach his head to repaint it or decorate it with a garland during the festival). On the other hand, they are brought forth by Viṣṇu, and their direct opposition to the vīras perhaps lends them a renewed meaning. But has not

[22]For the most complete account of the myth such as it occurs in a "street theater" text, cf. idem, 523 ff.

Jāmadagnya asserted himself as an avatāra of Viṣṇu? The seven munis are vegetarians like the goddess, so much so that one cannot seek among them any negative role with regard to the goddess, who is not placed beside them in the position of a wife. Moreover, Fire has appeared on the side of the vīras, but he is more particularly—and let us say more classically, thinking of Pōtu Rāju—the vīra converted to the goddess's service. Before considering the ritual, it must also suffice to add that Subrahmaṇya was formerly called Pāvaki, son of Fire, which recalls the seven Ṛṣis and their unfortunate wives made pregnant by Agni, with the exception of the very virtuous wife of the very powerful muni Vasiṣṭha (who would make an altogether plausible Vāḷumuni). But Pārvatī adopted this son of Fire, forming a kind of matrimonial link between herself and Agni, or more aptly, Agnivīra, the sacrificial Fire that exceeds the limits assigned to it. This matrimonial link is not recognized by the devotees, who thus refuse within this ensemble to give Mannārsvāmi to the goddess as a husband, and thus to marry her. One always runs up against the same ambiguity concerning the status of the goddess, and it is the annual festival that can decide things. Rather than evoking Kārtavīrya as the aggressor of Jamadagni, Agnivīra thus evokes the Fire to whom this too pious king delivers his kingdom by his excess of piety, this Fire who devours all, even the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha (MBh 12.49 [idem]). It is the Earth, and at the same time Paccaivāḷiyamman, who falls subject to this aggression, and who appeals to her traditional defender, Viṣṇu. We thus find ourselves on familiar ground, with the symbolic points of reference having changed only in appearance. It is also a question of preventing Fire from being extinguished if the Earth is to live, and Agnivīra is this "converted" Fire, having been restored to its bounds and made respectful of the dharma that Paccai Amman incarnates. As guardian of the dharma, he can only be destined for violent tasks and a diet of meat. One can already better understand the secondary role played by Śiva in this complex: he could be the replica of Agnivīra, rehabilitated but left to his meditation (he faces Kailāsa). Mannārsvāmi or Mannādasvāmi means "Master of the Earth." But Śiva is also the sacrificial fire, the Fire who periodically consumes the world in order to renew it.[23] With this in mind, let us now turn our attention to the festival.

I will choose to describe the temple festival at Kanniyakōyil (South Arcot Dt., Kaḍalūr Tk.) because it is there that my very prudent question as to the relationship between the Vanniyars and Agnivīra received a response from an old man, with whose opinion everyone agreed: it is impossible to identify Agnivīra with their ancestor.

In a ceremony on the second Friday in Āḍi (July-August), permission is sought of all the deities to celebrate the festival: Gaṇeśa (who appears at the entrance), then Mannārsvāmi, Paccai Amman, Subrahmaṇya and his consorts, Vāḷumuni, Agnivīra, Maduraivīra (a recent arrival here, in line with Agnivīra). Should the response be positive, a lamp-offering is made to each of them. On the following Saturday, four groups are formed and charged with going to invite the devotees to the festival (that is, practically speaking, to the firewalk). One group is from the locality, and three others

[23]Vanniyars perhaps did not discover all this themselves: the intervention of gurukkals in the festival has probably enriched the cult with a number of elements. The Paccai Amman whose sanctuary is to the north of Tiruvannāmalai is the kuladevam of the elder branch of gurukkal arcakas, the cult priests who serve in the Tiruvannāmalai temple. Cf. Reiniche 1989, 77 n. 9.

were brought together on the preceding day from neighboring localities. Each group consists of five persons: two or three Paḍaiyāṭci pūcāris, of whom two play the cilambu (a curved hollow ring filled with pebbles), a Dāsar musician who plays the tappu (cymbals and tambourine), and a Paḍaiyāṭci carrying a *pūntēr* on his head (the *pūn-tēr* is a miniature chariot of light structure in which the bearer has placed one of the utsavamūrtis from the temple decorated with flowers; plate 104). Each group has its clientele, its network of relations, and they divide the villages to be covered among themselves accordingly. All of those invited—and with greater reason, those extending the invitations—have Paccai Ammaṉ as kuladevam. The circuit will last thirteen days and those called together from more distant places are sent invitations by post. Each of the groups receives a dakṣiṇā from the houses they invite.

On the third Thursday in Āḍi, thus in the following week, the banner is raised to signal the festival's real beginning. For this, the services of a gurukkaḷ are required. He establishes an oblation fire in the maṇḍapa on the bare ground facing the sanctum and places a kalaśa filled with water beside it, between the fire and the sanctum. He traces a trident and an *om* on the banner and then hoists it. Next he ties protective kāppus on Gaṇeśa, Mannāda, Nandin, the balipīṭha and dhvajastambha, Paccai Ammaṉ and her two acolytes, the stationary Vaḷḷi-Devasenā-Subrahmaṇya icons, the Nandin in the sanctuary (as distinct from the one in front of Mannāda), the processional Vaḷḷi-Devasena-Subrahmaṇya icons fixed on the same pedestal, Vāḻumuni, Agnivīra, the pūcāri attached to the daily service of the temple (a Paḍaiyāṭci), and the dharmakartā. Paccai Ammaṉ is worshipped with lamps (*dīpārādhanā*). Then Subrahmaṇya and his two wives go in procession around Kaṉniyakōyil carried on a peacock, along with the pūcāri, musicians, dharmakartā, and crowd. Each house offers a dīpārādhanā. This procession will be repeated every day until the next Thursday.[24]

Beginning at an early hour Friday morning (that is, on the fourteenth day after their departure), the groups with the pūntērs return to the village, while those who have been invited gradually arrive during the day for the firewalk. The pūcāri of one of the groups from outside the locality (the *samayattar*s, "those who reunite for the occasion") has the privilege of ordering a clay pot, the future agnikaragam, from a potter from his village (Coriyamkuppam). He brings it along with his pūntēr. This pot has an openwork design (plate 51).

It is then that Subrahmaṇya's marriage to his two wives is celebrated (although some say it should only be his marriage to Vaḷḷi). The three utsavamūrtis go around the village in procession and enter the house of the pūcāri of the local pūntēr group, where a *pūṅkaragam* has been prepared (a metal pot filled with water and decorated with flowers that represents the goddess Paccai Ammaṉ). The pūcāri's pūntēr remains henceforth in his house. A painted marriage pot (*cāluṅkaragam*) is added to the pūṅkaragam. The utsavamūrtis and two karagams (pūṅkaragam and agnikaragam) go from there to the "house of the fiancée," that is to say, the neighboring house that represents the side of the bride, to invite her "family" to the marriage. The side of the bridegroom (that is,

[24]The goddess has no processional mūrti here, and at no time leaves the temple, but this cannot be generalized since she does have such icons at other of her temples, and the absence here could result from a theft or some other more or less datable incident.

the pūcāri's group) receives gifts of garments and ornaments from the bride's family (which, as is customary, covers the marriage expenses). All together, they then join the other three pūntēr groups near a tank, and these too are invited to the marriage.

During all these days of preparations and invitations, the large terra-cotta statues outside the temple (munis, etc.) are repainted. From the tank, all the groups proceed to the temple and come to a halt at Vāḷumuni. It is then that the latter's "eyes are opened," that is, the final brush strokes are given to form the eyes, till then missing. This is the final act that gives life to all the painted statues. Then, entering the temple, the utsavamūrtis are placed on a seat in front of the sanctuary and the pūṅkaragam is put inside the sanctuary. The gurukkaḷ, who has come once again, officiates as at an ordinary marriage with a homa and kalaśa. After the marriage, kāppus are tied to the wrists of those who will carry the agnikaragam, pūṅkaragam, and a gaṅgaikaragam (a metal pot) that accompanies them. The latter would be intended to appease the burning sensation of the fire.

The homa fire from the marriage ceremony is gathered in a brass pot that the pūcāri takes up with margosa leaves for insulation and carries, surrounded by musicians, to the tīmidi site, where Ācāris (artisans) will prepare the embers for the firewalk by lighting the fire with fire from the marriage homa. Wood has previously been collected at the chosen site, which is located outside the temple area. At the same time, the openwork firepot or agnikaragam (plate 51) is prepared near a tank different from the first and situated to the west of the temple. Pieces of wood are deposited in it along with clarified butter and camphor, while the crowd passes through the temple to make offerings of coconuts and other customary vegetable items. The gaṅgaikaragam is filled with water and decorated with flowers.

During this time, those devotees who are to participate in the firewalk have bathed and clad themselves in new yellow dhotis, sometimes adding garlands. They take margosa[25] leaves in either hand. The utsavamūrtis of Subrahmaṇya and his wives, as well as the pūṅkaragam that represents the goddess (a pot filled with water, rice grains, etc., and decorated with flowers), proceed, accompanied by musicians, to the tank where the other karagams have been prepared. With the pūṅkaragam in the lead, followed by the agnikaragam and the gaṅgaikaragam, they leave from the tank in procession and go around the temple by the north as far as a palmyra tree (borassus) to the southeast, which is the landmark near the embers for the firewalk. After a dīpārādhanā, the pūcāri lights the agnikaragam with the camphor from the dīpārādhanā. When the fire is ready and the devotees are in position with the karagams, the utsavamūrtis are placed in front of the temple, outside it and facing toward the east and the tīmidi. The firewalkers enter the coals from the west, facing the utsavamūrtis (which at other temples can include a painted wooden statue of Agnivīra): the pūṅkaragam first, then the agnikaragam and gaṅgaikaragam, and the firewalking devotees. The three karagams then make a pradakṣiṇā of the temple before entering it. The utsavamūrtis go around the village in procession and then return to the temple.

The following night, a "street theater" performance represents the marriage of Vaḷḷi and the story of Paccai Amman.

[25]One may recall that the margosa (neem) is the Goddess's tree par excellence, and that it denotes coolness.

The next and final day is marked by an evening procession of the pūntērs and the pūṅkaragam around the village. Every house offers them a dīpārādhanā and sprinkles them with turmeric water (*mañcalnīr*). The utsavamūrtis of Subrahmaṇya and his wives may accompany them. Having returned to the temple, all the kāppus are removed and the banner is lowered and shared among five pūcāris. The pūṅkaragam is taken back to the house of the pūcāri.

No doubt a more probing inquiry into the processions "around the village" would have afforded information about the sociological context. But as it stands, this is not just another ritual since it enables us to specify what a tīmidi ritual is as a totality, and not as a picturesque addendum to a goddess's cult. Here the entire cult is oriented toward the final firewalk.

Correlating what has been learned from the myth of Agnivīra, the temple with its little sanctuary consecrated to Agnivīra, and the possible role of a painted wooden utsavamūrti of Agnivīra appearing as the guardian of Subrahmaṇya and his wives at the time of the tīmidi, we are better equipped to approach a question to which Vanniyar respondents did not know how to answer: what does the agnikaragam that follows behind the pūṅkaragam of the goddess in the firewalk represent? This pot containing fire calls to mind the pūcaṭṭi in Kongunad, except for one detail; it follows the goddess, accompanies her, and does not oppress her. Informants say that it is the goddess's śakti, which is not very convincing since the goddess is her own śakti, but it does at least establish a positive relationship between the two. Would it not, however, be more logical to recognize in the agnikaragam the cultic figure of Agnivīra, that is, the form of Agni who faithfully plays his role as guardian of the Earth, the pure fire fed with clarified butter and well ventilated by the openings in the clay pot to yield a clean flame? It is even tempting to formally compare the pūcaṭṭi, aflame and pitiless, with this firepot that is "appeased" in its relation to the Earth, two clay pots in the role of the "pan of fire" that one finds in the myth of Purūravas and Urvaśī in the manner of the *sthālī* (ŚPB 11.5.1.13). This terra-cotta firepot is itself already a symbol of the sacrificial altar upon which one will deposit the oblation fire, and in ŚPB 11.5.1.13 it transforms itself into a śamī while the fire becomes a pipal. In Sanskrit, *sthālī* is first of all a surface of dry earth before being a pan of fire. It is a matrix of earth for Agni, explains ŚPB 6.5.2.21 with regards to the *ukhā,* the pot of fire that also plays a role in the construction of the fire altar.[26] Here in the tīmidi, the firepot is as a replica of the pūṅkaragam (of metal) complemented by the Fire. The association of the two pots is the totality formed by two essential constituents of the human world, but the Earth affirms her mastery since she precedes the Fire, and because the latter is clearly subservient under his form of Agnivīra enclosed in an earthen pot. But both of them traverse a "devouring fire." The tīmidi site is a cosmos aflame, Śiva unleashed, a periodic renewal of the world. The devotees who assist in this renewal—not very consciously, since they make their vows out of personal interest—participate in the tapas of the Earth afire, and their penance reproduces the Earth's grappling with Fire.

It was therefore quite right to have seen, for example in the Draupadī festival, the embers of the tīmidi area (a few square meters in all) as the fire of war burning the

[26]Regarding the making of the ukhā in the aśvamedha, cf. Dumont 1927, 58 ff.

Earth; but beyond that, and as a result of the suffering of the Earth, who has lost her protecting warriors, this is the fire of the end of the world that periodically appears to rid the Earth of the dross of dharma and lend her a new countenance. Here there is no war, strictly speaking, but a simple aggression against the goddess who prompts a rejoinder from Viṣṇu, the traditional mediator when the world's destiny is at stake. War is thus the epic image of an end of the world, and the firewalk would lose any "eschatological" significance if one were to limit oneself to the disaster of war. On the other hand, the Fire must symbolically rediscover its epithet of śamīgarbha. It is the śamī (Tamil *vaṉṉi*) tree that contains the latent fire ready to ignite itself in the sacrifice, but also the fire of the disaster that it will be able to control since the goddess now traverses the fire. One will thus not be surprised to find the śamī later on directly identified with the royal goddess of victory. It is always the same symbolic composite at work which, beyond the epic, goes back to the Vedic Revelation. Nor is it surprising that the subdued Fire—which is Agnivīra—takes the place of the Vedic god Agni. The dichotomy has become more pronounced between meat eaters and vegetarians, and Fire remains "the one who consumes all," beginning with the flesh of corpses on the pyre, or sacrificial victims. The impure is as indispensable to the world as the pure.

There remains the marriage of Subrahmaṇya which, theoretically, is necessary for the lighting of the tīmidi fire. Since all the goddesses studied until now in Tamil country are in a region where Subrahmaṇya is the great god of bhakti, this does not represent a distinctive feature. On the other hand, rather than his introduction as the son of Pārvatī (the goddess, moreover, who appealed to Viṣṇu), it is his marriage that has real importance, and, according to the myth, his marriage to Vaḷḷi. But his rapport with Fire in several versions of the myth of his birth makes him the son of Fire, Pāvaki, and very specifically of the purificatory Fire. That may help Paccai Amman̲ to become Pārvatī, but it is not the determining factor. In addition, the local myth makes Agnivīra the son of Śūrapadma, the main asura fought by Subrahmaṇya. Agnivīra's conversion to the service of Paccai Amman̲ thus also entails his submission to Subrahmaṇya.

One knows that Devasenā, Subrahmaṇya's first wife (and the only one going back to the Sanskrit epic tradition), is by name "the army of the gods," of whom Indra would want to be the commander, and the husband (*pati*). Now in becoming the great god of the Tamil country, Subrahmaṇya lost his classical name Skanda but gained a second wife from the mountain-dwelling Kuṟavar caste whom he chose out of love, in contrast to the first. For this reason, maṇḍapas of Paccai Amman̲ temples do not fail to represent Kuṟavars and Kuṟattis in them. Vaḷḷi, a devoted daughter to her parents, was entrusted to keep close watch over a plot of millet in the middle of the forest. When Subrahmaṇya began to court her, she remained motionless near her millet field and the god had no other choice but to go there and clandestinely meet her. The millet plot is an image of the Earth as peaceful but exposed to all the dangers prevailing in a region of mountainous forest, for which Tamil literary convention makes millet the symbolic plant. Vaḷḷi watches over it out of obedience to her parents, and this is the form taken by her tapas, her asceticism. This does not prevent her from having a lower status than Devasenā, but everyone concurs in making her the goddess of devotion. The quarrels between the two women, once they have become Subrahmaṇya's wives, are incessant. The myth recounted by the street theater presents Paccai Amman̲ as the witness of one of their bouts

and the capable mediator between them. Since it is Vaḷḷi's marriage that is important in the cult, it is obvious that Vaṉṉiyars, and Paccai Ammaṉ along with them, recognize her superiority, if not by birth, then at least in her rapport with the Earth. In addition, if Vaḷḷi has such importance, Paccai Ammaṉ need not be Pārvatī. She is herself devoted to Vaḷḷi, whose marriage to Fire's son is a guarantee of good order, of an Earth tranquil as a plot of millet under ascetic surveillance. It is indeed Vaḷḷi and not Devasenā who is the goddess of bhakti; it is perhaps also in her that Paccai Ammaṉ, who does not fight herself but has others do so for her, recognizes for herself a protectress. Paccai-vāḻiyammaṉ ("Lady of Verdant Prosperity") probably has some relation to the field of millet, which appears to be more suited to her name than her relationship to Fire, which is in any case indispensable. The hierarchy is thus safeguarded and Paccai Ammaṉ designs for herself a classical backcloth from which the Buffalo has entirely disappeared. Yet one should know not to forget that one of Mahiṣāsura's very first classical appearances is in one of the epic versions of the Skanda myth, in which he is Skanda's adversary.

3. The Cremation Ground

The *macāṉa-koḷḷai* or *mayāṉa-koḷḷai* (*macāṉam*/*mayāṉam* < Skt. *śmaśāna,* "cremation ground") is the essential element of the annual festival of the goddess Aṅkāḷammaṉ, whom the *Tamil Lexicon* (s.v. mayāṉa-koḷḷai, p. 3074) describes as belonging to the Cempaḍavars (a caste of freshwater fishermen) and connects with the myth of the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice. In fact, it seems that the rite would not be special to the Cempaḍavars. It is encountered in Chingleput, North Arcot, and South Arcot Districts, always in connection with the goddess Aṅkāḷammaṉ, whose festival begins on Śivarātri in Māci (February-March).[27] The name Aṅkāḷammaṉ (which was found among the names of grāmadevatās in Āndhra) is a possible deformation of the Sanskrit Mahākālī.

Our example of it presents the ritual in a degraded state, but at a place that must have been one of the most beautiful sites of buffalo sacrifice in Tamilnadu: Erumaiveṭṭi-pāḷaiyam (Chingleput Dt., Ponneri Tk.), whose name means "the village where buffalo are slain" (cf. Māḍuveṭṭimaṅgalam). A Śiva temple is found in the settlement, and on a hill overlooking it is a temple to Perumāḷ, who is here Rāma. Outside the inhabited space and cultivated fields in an extensively deforested jāṅgal, four goddesses stand watch at the four cardinal points: Maṟakkaḷammaṉ (? represented by a head: "Ammaṉ of the Battlefield"), Aṅkāḷammaṉ, Poṉṉiyammaṉ, and Kākkiyatāy, a simple unsheltered effigy lost in the undergrowth.

The local myth is a nonclassical *Rāmāyaṇa* episode. Sītā, bathing one day in the Kucattalai (Kuśasthalā) river, was assailed by the demon Kākkasuraṉ (< Skt. *kāka*,

[27]The rite is described by Thurston 1909, vol. 6, pp. 356-59, s.v. Sempadavan. Two quite different variants are given, one from the Aṅkāḷammaṉ temple in Malaiyanūr (South Arcot Dt., Gingee Tk.), the other from the temple in Walajapet (North Arcot Dt., Walajapet Tk.). The variant given here is closer to that from Walajapet. Cf. Francis 1906, 363-64 regarding the Malaiyanūr ritual. One should now also consult the extensive study of Aṅkāḷammaṉ by E. Masilamani-Meyer (Meyer 1986).

"crow"). She appealed to Rāma who, sunk in his yoga, could not be disturbed. He took a blade of kuśa grass and divided it into four parts, thus creating four goddesses whom he charged with Sītā's protection.[28] They united in Aṇkāḷamman̲, who slew the demon: thus an anthropomorphic Kākkasura is represented recumbent on the pedestal of the goddess's statue, that is, beneath her feet. The deity has a royal tiara on her head that is encircled by a halo of flames, and eight arms bearing indistinct attributes. Her temple faces north and has a small interior subshrine added onto the western wall that contains a liṅga, and a small exterior aedicule oriented toward the west that is consecrated to an anthropomorphic Munīśvara. The temple is on the summit of a hill, at the bottom of which is a small Vīrabhadra sanctuary. Kākkasura is said to be a form of Mahiṣāsura, and the annual festival in Māsi celebrates Aṅkāḷamman̲'s victory over him. She alone has the right to a festival, and the goddesses are never brought together. Strangest of all is that the distant memory of the buffalo sacrifice is associated with Ponniyamman̲, who is also located at a height and comparatively closer to the Perumāḷ temple. This goddess, however, has only four arms (two of which wield the triśūla and kapāla), but her head is also crowned and encircled by flames. She has no demon beneath her feet, but one can discern on the socle the rough relief of a warrior in combat. She still receives votive offerings of goats and cocks, and she has her own priest, an Ōccar Mudaliyār (a sacerdotal caste linked to the goddesses), the only person at the site who could serve as an informant. Aṅkāḷamman̲'s paṇḍāram priest was an uninformed adolescent whom his maternal uncle, who lived a dozen kilometers from the village, had apparently installed in his place. The Mudaliyār still knows that during the buffalo sacrifice there were so many buffalo, the goddess Ponniyamman̲ had to cross a "river of blood" (let us recall Draupadī's chariot rolling over Duryodhana's thighs, or her crossing the fire carried by her priest); but this is something he himself has only heard of and not seen, although he is no longer young.

Beginning on Śivarātri, Aṅkāḷamman̲'s festival lasts three days. The first day's expenses are the responsibility of the paṇḍāram's brother-in-law. Essentially, a procession of the goddess's utsavamūrti goes through the village on a simple pedestal. The second day, with the mayāṉa-koḷḷai, is the festival's main attraction. A Ceṭṭi (merchant) from Chennai has the obligation of presiding and meeting the expenses, and although he no longer has lands in the village, this hereditary right in itself proves that he formerly did so. Aṅkāḷamman̲'s utsavamūrti is taken to the cremation ground near the river, which faces the temple. Just beside the śmaśāna, a female lying on her back has been fashioned of sand (theoretically, with ashes from the cremation ground): this is Aṅkāḷamman̲. Four paṇḍārams sing the goddess's praises, accompanied by *pambai*, *ḍamaru*, and cilambu. Another paṇḍāram attires himself as Vīrabhadra and bears a triśūla. Led by singers and musicians, and with Vīrabhadra coming along in a state of trance, they go nine times around the recumbent goddess and a large heap of food (sweet poṅgal, fruits, coconuts) that has been deposited at her feet. Some devotees also get possessed. At the ninth circumambulation, Aṅkāḷamman̲'s priest sacrifices a goat by decapitation. Some cooked rice is then brought to the priest, who mixes it with the

[28]Sītā, "the sown furrow"—are we far from the millet field entrusted to the care of Valli?

victim's blood and spreads the mixture all around the sand effigy. The goat goes to the priest, except for the intestines, which go to the Paṟaiyar who plays the tappaṭṭai drum. The goddess's utsavamūrti then leaves to go on procession around the village, while those around the prone Aṅkāḷammaṉ rush to get hold of bits of the food at her feet (*koḷḷai* = "pillage"), destroying her sand effigy in the process. The processional icon returns to the temple after its procession in the village.

On the third and final day, a pūcāri from the Karṇam or Kaṇakkupiḷḷai caste (accountants, treasurers) carries the goddess in procession around the village in the form of a decorated karagam. Only one musician, the pambai player, accompanies them. Each house pours turmeric water over the pūcāri's feet and makes offerings to the goddess and worships her. The return to the temple marks the festival's conclusion.

The Aṅkāḷammaṉ cult delves back here into a twofold mythical heritage. First, grafting onto the *Rāmāyaṇa,* it focuses the asura's aggression on Sītā ("the sown furrow"), to which Rāma responds by creating goddesses at the four cardinal points. Aṅkāḷammaṉ, or the four goddesses in one, overcomes the asura. The latter, Kākkasura, is one of the numerous transformations of Mahiṣāsura; he is thus linked to the buffalo sacrifices, which must have been held here on a grand scale. As matters now stand, it is impossible to link the Aṅkāḷammaṉ festival with the buffalo sacrifices to Ponniyammaṉ, but since we have other testimony to this particular form of worship (cf. above, p. 285, n. 28) unconnected with the buffalo sacrifice, we can risk an interpretation of the ritual as it presently exists. The festival's central rite, "the pillaging of the cremation ground," is related to the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice, as the presence of Vīrabhadra already indicates.[29] A link is thus assured between the presence of the Rāma temple and the guardian goddesses of the four directions, of whom Aṅkāḷammaṉ is no doubt the main one. But if Aṅkāḷammaṉ subdues Kākkasura, one does not initially see how their battle leads to the scene of the cremation ground. There is no fire here, only cold ashes—those left by the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice, which transforms the cosmos into a vast śmaśāna. The sacrificial arena always has a cosmic dimension, and the destruction of the sacrifice by Śiva or by Kālī assisted by Vīrabhadra is equivalent to the sacrifice of the Sacrifice. But faced with such bedlam, the goddess casts herself into the sacrificial fire. When all is said and done, the cremation ground and, more than that, the body recomposed of the goddess's "ashes" evoke the myth of Satī (better known in north India). After the decapitation of Reṇukā, the austerities of Draupadī, the demon's assault on Paccai Ammaṉ . . . it is a new version of the sacrifice of the Goddess. But her passage through suffering, like that of the cosmic fire, seems to end in disaster. At least, so one might think had not a large heap of food emerged at her charred feet, or better, from her feet which have passed through the destructive fire.

[29]The myth given by Thurston 1909, vol. 6, pertaining to the Malaiyanūr temple is not a version of the sacrifice of Daksa, but a modified form of the clash between Śiva and Brahmā, at the conclusion of which Śiva severs Brahmā's head (not the fifth). In fact, the two purānic myths, the destruction of Daksa's sacrifice and the loss of Brahmā's fifth head, have the same source in the Brāhmanas. It is originally a question of the place occupied by Rudra-Śiva in the Vedic sacrifice. It is particularly interesting to observe divergent myths originating from the same scriptural source, with all imaginable modifications, to account for one and the same rite concerning the Goddess. At what level did the differentiation, or convergence, operate?

There thus exists a direct link between the sacrifice of Kālī and the appearance of a large quantity of fresh dishes. The destruction of the sacrifice and the sacrifice of Kālī are thus not the end of everything. They are, on the contrary, the necessary passage to a new cosmos, a new prosperity. Yet the fact remains that the cremation ground and the food take the form of what appears to be a funeral rite: nine circumambulations of the body and the food, followed by a goat sacrifice (to the goddess). The victim's blood mixed with rice and spread all around is an apotropaic blood rite similar to the worship of the śaktis in Āndhra (see above, pp. 14 ff.), which is geographically adjacent. The passage from the funeral rite to the tumultuous and avid pillaging of the food as well as the obliteration of any trace of the goddess's body (she escapes in the form of her processional mūrti), raise at least one question: what do the overexcited actors represent, and how can one account for the funeral rite/food-pillaging sequence? This leads to another question that has remained in abeyance beneath our noses: why has Mahiṣāsura taken the form of Kākkasura, a demonic crow, and at what moment does this appear in the ritual? But really it is one and the same question. One is referred by the ninefold circumambulation, followed by the offering of blood-drenched food, to a funeral rite that is still known today.[30] In addition, the ensuing melee is the only kind of "combat" included in the ritual. It is a matter of a rite on the tenth day following the cremation of a body, an example of the nearly generalizable case of condensing into ten days what would extend over a year. On the tenth day, a rice ball is offered on five jars of water (the number varies) deposited on a vedi of loose earth at the very place where the cremation took place. The mourners then anxiously await the arrival of one or more crows to seize the food, and cannot leave until they are assured that this has happened: should no crows appear despite all that has been done to attract them, it is concluded that the person died with an unfulfilled desire—which allows one to foresee a number of future difficulties with the deceased. The nine circumambulations would thus correspond to the nine days that pass between the cremation and this rite, and the body fashioned of sand becomes the vedi itself—which we know to symbolize the Earth, as does the goddess. As for the crowd that rushes forward, they are the awaited crows who consume the food offered to the goddess and ensure her future destiny. Their action even integrates them with the divine action, first as asuric birds, which crows habitually are, and then above all as the goddess's devotees.

The mythico-ritual complex that we see moving from transformation to transformation must have been remarkably stable for the crow to have been connected to the myth of the buffalo-demon. The DM itself suggests these unlimited transformations, since Mahiṣa assumes all possible forms to elude the goddess. Here he becomes a crow to guarantee the success of the sacrifice of the goddess, and combines his asuric nature and his conversion. Just as the crow appears as an ultimate (?) transformation of the Buffalo, the cremation ground exhausts the baneful forms of Fire and assures the Goddess's victory. The latter, married but not accepted by her father, resembles all the other goddesses with ambiguous status. She casts herself into the fire while her husband escapes it.

[30]Cf. Kane 1930-62, vol. 6, 263-64, who cites in particular the *Śuddhikaumudī* on the crow's role as Yama's messenger. The same chapter, passim, describes the use made of a śamī branch in funeral rites.

One could never prove that such a rite, especially with the crows, would have its source in the post-god of Āndhra, whom one finds some one hundred kilometers farther north. But whatever the paths, the intermediary forms that can no longer be discerned, one can no longer deny that the same complex would be at work starting from the fire-śamī component of Pōtu Rāju. Moreover, neighboring contemporary forms like that of the firewalk help to establish a semantic link between all the transformations of the fire. We have seen the banana tree and a heap of food play surprising roles, all of which recall that Fire only unleashes itself in the universe so as to better becalm itself later, and that its birth from the śamī remains a determinative element in this cyclical role.

C. The Śamīpūjā

Up to now, the śamī has been found rather more on the side of the "demon," to which it was not particularly disposed by its Vedic origins. It has even, with Vaṉṉiya-suraṉ, been identified as the asura itself, after having given refuge to Suḍalai Māḍaṉ. In the different roles it has assumed since Āndhra, it has also always remained on the level of "popular" cults, those that are local and connected with a village settlement. It has also had a tendency to appear at the boundary of the inhabited zone, since it is associated with the boundary goddess, and since it plays an essential part in the protection of that boundary.

It is this function—derived more from the sacrificial post, mediator between the internal and the external, than from the kindling sticks—that links its asuric status to its elevation to the rank of a goddess, to the status of the Goddess herself, the Victorious, the Unvanquished: it thus takes part in the apparatus of royal goddesses. In effect, the śamīpūjā is first of all a royal rite, integrated into the celebration of Vijayādaśamī (like the Vaṉṉiyasurasaṃhāra). That already has the effect of changing the notion of boundary: the limit of the kingdom or, more symbolically, of the capital substitutes for that of the village. And one already perceives the shift that will be produced. The cult of the śamī can replace the cult of the boundary goddess; the śamī can fulfil the function of the boundary goddess, a complementary aspect of the goddess who protects the royal lineage and customarily resides in the palace at the heart of the capital. Can we thus discern a kind of law according to which the śamīpūjā would not only indicate a royal presence, but further imply the absence of a boundary goddess other than the śamī? The facts are not so simple, at least not those to which we have access.[31]

A rite on the royal level—and perhaps also a rite included among the more sumptuous festivals of Hindu kingdoms, Navarātri—immediately assumes a certain historic depth. Travelers who have left accounts of their observations in India have not failed to note the splendors of the Nine Nights, but mention of the śamīpūjā is much more infrequent. Thus for Karṇāṭaka, the Durgāpūjā (or rather Vijayādaśamī, the only part that concerns us here) is mentioned by Nicolo de Conti (1420-21).[32] But in 1648 Govinda Vaidya accurately noted in his *Kaṇṭhīrava-narasarāja-vijayam* that the tenth day of the festival

[31]The question has already been briefly considered in Biardeau 1981a, 220ff. (= 1984, English version).

[32]See the quotations of travelers on the subject of the celebrations in Karnāṭaka in Rao 1936, vii.

included a śamīpūjā outside the capital.[33] When the *Annals of Mysore* specify that in 1610 King Wodeyar determined the ritual of the festivals that were to take place in his capital of Seringapatam at his assumption of power, the śamīpūjā would have probably been included in the program.[34] As for the north, a legend concerning Vallabha shows at least the symbolic importance of the śamī, and its link with Kṛṣṇa is not without interest, whatever the historical coefficient may be and the date attributed to the legend.[35] While Vallabha, one of the masters of Kṛṣṇaism in the line of Caitanya, was visiting the Mathurā region, he had a vision of the Yamunā River personified, who pointed out to him a śamī tree on a riverbank as the place, Gokula, where Kṛṣṇa passed his childhood. Vallabha surrounded the tree with a platform, and it is around this tree that the Braj landscape such as it is known today organized itself. The legend has at least the merit of admitting the recent identification of this Hindu sacred place. But it is not certain that the śamī in question would be the goddess of Vijayādaśamī. One would rather be inclined to see in it the replica of the Bhāṇḍīra banyan in the *Harivaṃśa,* under which Kṛṣṇa and his brother played war games. As noted earlier,[36] this banyan itself appears to be an echo of the śamī in MBh 4, and the inverse passage from banyan to śamī would be a good testimony to the symbol's continuity (knowing that the banyan replaces the śamī in certain "tree marriages").[37] At the same time, it may indicate a possible ritual utilization of the śamī.

The *Nirṇayasindhu,* that precious collection of rituals dating from the early seventeenth century that directs us toward the Deccan, certainly knows a ritual in which the śamī plays an essential role, although the term śamīpūjā does not appear there. It specifies that for Vijayādaśamī one must worship Aparājitā, the Unvanquished, and "cross the limit"—*ullaṅghayeyuḥ sīmānam.* The *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* of Hemādri (thirteenth century) is cited, and for the offering to the śamī, it refers in the last resort to the *Gopatha-brāhmaṇa* and above all to the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa,* where the passages quoted can unfortunately not be found.[38] Nevertheless, at least at the beginning of the seventeenth

[33]Ibid.

[34]In the late *Bhaviṣyottara-purāṇa* cited by Rao (1936), a king (which one?) declared to Vasiṣṭha in 12.71 that his kuladevī was Śamī, like that of the Pāṇḍavas. In fact, this verse does not appear in the only known edition in *nāgarī* of the *Bhaviṣyottara* (= *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* 4), that of the Venkateshvar Steam Press of Bombay, whose chap. 12 has only 38 *ślokas*. More important, it appears to me, is the fact that the same *Bhaviṣyottara* devotes its chap. 138 to the celebration of the Goddess at Mahāṣṭamī and Mahānavamī, and makes no allusion to a Vijayādaśamī, to which the śamīpūjā is typically linked. According to Hazra (1963, 11 and n. 43), this chapter is an important source for the secondary *nibandhas* of Orissa, of western and southern (?) India. However, the only precise quotation he gives from *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* 2.1 mentions only the navamī, and unless I am mistaken, it does not speak of the śamīpūjā, which was, moreover, never more than one rite among others on Vijayādaśamī (the *Kṛtyakalpataru*—twelfth century—also knows only Mahānavamī). On the other hand, he cites *Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa* 1.22, a source on ritual in Bengal, Mithilā, and Assam, where Vijayādaśamī is typically marked by the Śabarotsava, a ceremony consisting of erotic chants.

[35]Cf. Vaudeville 1976, 201 and n. 17.

[36]Cf. above, p. 87, n. 29.

[37]Cf. above, p. 87.

[38]See above and *Nirṇayasindhu,* pp. 141-42. One wonders if the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* (and its fourth part) has not played the same role of fictitious grab bag for rituals that the *Skanda-purāṇa* has played for myths. Attached to it are unremarkable verses that have existed separately as popular sayings.

century there existed a rite in which the śamī was practically deified, even if one doesn't know exactly to what extent or with what ambiguity, considering the double meaning of the formulas: *amaṅgalānāṃ śamanīṃ śamanīṃ duṣkṛtasya ca/ duḥsvapanāśinīṃ dhanyām prapadye 'haṃ śamīṃ śubhām//* "I take refuge in the beautiful and opulent śamī, which puts an end to misfortunes [or: to all that is unfavorable, thus enemies], which puts an end to sin and makes bad dreams disappear"; *śamī śamayate pāpaṃ śamī lohitakaṇṭakā/ dhāraṇyarjunabāṇānāṃ rāmasya priyavādinī//* "the śami puts an end to sin [or: makes the wicked perish, that is, the enemy], the śamī with red thorns that held the arrows of Arjuna and had benevolent words for Rāma." The formulas can have a domestic application as well as a royal bearing, the latter above all by the mention of the red thorns, color of the warrior and of blood, and by the rapport with the epic heroes (we shall return to this last point). The expression *prapadye 'ham śamīṃ śubhām*, the very formula by which the devotee takes refuge in his chosen deity, seems indeed to make the śamī a goddess, or rather a form of the Goddess: she whom one associates with Vijayādaśamī. However, the link between the worship of Aparājitā and that of the śamī is not noted by the NS: they are two separate moments in the day's celebration.

These two rites must be kept distinct, since the modern *Dharmasindhu* (ca. 1790), resuming the NS faithfully without mentioning its real or supposed "sources," enumerates three rites for Vijayādaśamī: the *aparājitā-pūjana,* the *sīmollaṅghana,* and the *śamīpūjana,*[39] and indicates that the "crossing of the limit" can take place either before or after the worship of the śamī. This apparently stems from the position of the tree, which is sometimes on the interior border, sometimes on the exterior "frontier" border of the territory concerned. The sequence of the three rites with their modern names appears to correspond exactly to the prescriptions of the *Nirṇayasindhu*.

But at this point, the Sanskrit digests are replaced by accounts from nineteenth-century British writers that describe what actually happened before their eyes at specific places. If Monier-Williams (1971, 171) indicates only that "the śamī or *Acacia* is itself a goddess, supposed to contain fire," Tod, in 1829, notes that on the tenth day or "Dahsara . . . the Rana (of Udaipur in Mewar), his chiefs, and their retainers repair to the field of Mars, worship the *khejra* tree, liberate the *nilkanth* or jay (sacred to Rāma), and return amidst a discharge of guns."[40] As to Sleeman's "editor" Smith (1915, 1, 213), he makes of Aparājitā the name by which one addresses the goddess śamī, and connects this cult—perhaps correctly—with the episode in MBh 4.5 in which the Pāṇḍavas entrust their weapons to the śamī (which he identifies as the *Acacia suma*). He is alone in doing so. Although we do not know how the goddess Aparājitā and the goddess Śamī came to be identified with each other, it is at least likely that they were both linked to the ritual of Vijayādaśamī and that Aparājitā was, in short, the royal goddess of the boundary, while the śamī tree (or post?) would have materially represented this boundary and could, therefore, only with difficulty have been separated from the goddess to whom it could at least offer a sure sanctuary.

[39]DS 1968, 196-97.

[40]Tod and Crooke 1971, vol. 2, 683. A note indicates that the *khejra* tree is *Prosopis spicigera*, the customary identification of the śamī in north India.

The mythic background of Vijayādaśamī may be somewhat disappointing, but it enables one to move a little further into the alchemy of symbols. Most surprising is that this ritual, which is first of all royal[41] even if it has some popular spinoffs, takes on a mythic justification that is also nearly detached from Vedic sources, while it reinvents disconcerting epic sources for itself. Paradoxically, a British administrator quoted the only episode of the MBh that concerns the śamī (4.5) and is followed by a hymn to the Goddess (4.6 [App. I, No 5]), while a Brahman[42] questioned the same MBh 4.5 without mentioning that a hymn to the Goddess completes it.[43] The kings and little kings who preside at the śamīpūjā on the tenth day in the modern period generally relate it to an episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* unknown to the classical *Rāmāyaṇa,* which ignores the śamī. One story is that Rāma, after his victory over Rāvaṇa, thanks the Goddess in her form of the śamī before he returns to Ayodhyā: it is she to whom he prayed to finish off the demon's ten heads. He succeeds in his undertaking on mahāṣṭamī, that is, the eighth day upon which the Goddess slays the demon Mahiṣa. According to others (the variants usually cannot be specifically localized, even when provided by an accurate informant), Vijayādaśamī is the day when the gods came to congratulate the Goddess for her victory on the eighth day over Mahiṣa. In Jaipur, where the king is from the "solar dynasty" and thus a descendant of Rāma, the śamīpūjā is related to the overhaul of weapons that have rusted during the monsoon. The śamī restores the weapons' fire, and Vijayādaśamī thus marks the departure of renewed military expeditions (whence the "crossing of the limit" associated with it). All reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is thus absent, and what is evoked instead is the Vedic link of the śamī with the production of fire. A myth found throughout the Deccan is indirectly linked to the *Rāmāyaṇa* through Rāma's ancestor, King Raghu. A young Brahman is unable to pay the enormous dakṣiṇā in gold that his guru demands from him—the guru, let us add, having become wearied by his disciple's insistence upon discharging his debt. The young Brahman addresses King Raghu to ask him for the required sum. The king, however, is out of provisions from the great sacrifice he has just performed (which assures him victory over anyone he attacks). Too pious to let a Brahman leave unsatisfied, however, he recalls that Indra owes him "gifts," and prepares to attack him. Indra, terrified, addresses Kubera, god of wealth, and the latter makes a rain of gold coins fall upon a śamī. Raghu gathers what is necessary for the Brahman and allows his people to loot the rest. Not knowing where the gold came from, the people believe that it comes from the śamī. That explains the exchange of śamī leaves that takes place every year on the evening of Vijayādaśamī following the śamīpūjā: the śamī is of gold. Once again a Vedic belief is attached to a more or less epic personage, one who is in any case linked to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[44] A royal rite, the śamīpūjā prolongs itself by a domestic observance on account of the same myth. Curiously, Vijayādaśamī with its śamīpūjā is also related to an episode in the MBh that is equally absent from the classical version of that epic. On the day of Dasarā, the

[41]Regarding the royal character of the Durgāpūjā, cf. Nicholas 1981, 37.

[42]Cf. B. Ramakrishna Rao 1921, 309, but above all C. Hayavadana Rao 1936, 52.

[43]By relegating the hymn to the Goddess to the appendix, the MBh's critical edition only follows common opinion, whereas in the seventeenth century the rites on the tenth day brought Aparājitā and the śamī together.

[44]Cf. above, p. 56.

Pāṇḍavas went to perform pūjā to the śamī to retrieve their weapons and reappear in public. In fact, nothing tells us when the Pāṇḍavas went to look for their weapons. One is told only that Arjuna went there to take down his bow and quivers while making a pradakṣiṇā around the śamī at the moment before he must fight the Kauravas to recapture King Virāṭa's cows from them.[45] But they have barely completed their thirteenth year incognito, so Arjuna returns his weapons to the security of the śamī. After that, there is nothing more on the śamī in the main story of the MBh.

There is matter for reflection here: the double symbolism of the śamī (fire/gold) is linked to Vedic ritual, of which no one speaks and to which no reference is made. As to the attachment to an epic episode, it imposes itself to justify a royal myth that is directly about war, but not supported by any exact reference. The invention is all the more remarkable in that the "original" double symbolism (in any case, what constitutes for us the primary source on the usage of the śamī) remains intact—as it does in the formation of Pōtu Rāju. The link between kings and their epics, in which they believe to read the history of their dynasties, is in fact a secondary reinterpretation. It is even possible—as was noted in the case of Pōtu Rāju—that it would have proved necessary to account for the Goddess as martial and royal at the same time.[46]

The connection between the śamīpūjā and the epic also prompts another consideration. The *Rāmāyaṇa* by far prevails over the MBh in this brief review of the variants of the myth, notwithstanding the good reasons one would have had to make the opposite choice. This remains true in the south where many sites of goddess temples are identified with sites in the MBh. Everyone in fact knows Rāma as the perfect king and his kingdom, *rāmarājya*, as the perfect kingdom; correlatively, Sītā is first among *satīs*, perfect women. Whatever may be the similar themes developed in the MBh, Draupadī, wife of five husbands, would not have right to the title of *satī,* and the kingdom of Yudhiṣṭhira is not exalted by public confabulation like that of Rāma. It is, however, traditional to view the MBh as the story of the lunar dynasty and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as that of the solar dynasty. These two royal lines are already known in the MBh (2.14 [13]) and are not intended to oppose one another, quite the contrary. In Rājasthān, where remaining members of royal families know very well which line they belong to, the "descendants" of the lunar dynasty of Jaisalmer surprisingly celebrate an eight-day Durgāpūjā completed by a ninth-day Rāmanavamī consecrated to Rāma, without Vijayādaśamī. The association with one or the other dynasty thus played no role in the formation of the Vijayādaśamī myth. The traditional classification of the two epics, which could not be contested since it bears upon personages central to either line, did not weigh heavily on the mythic universe that enveloped those who claimed descent from

[45]MBh 4.40 and 67 (38 and 62* 1051).

[46]Shepherds, irrespective of their local caste, see themselves as directly linked to the royal Yādava "caste," that is, to the people of Krsna. They have thus also had their legend about the śamī. Cf. Elmore 1925, 111, n. 1: "The reason given by the shepherds for the sacredness of the jammi [śamī] is that at one time the shepherd kings wished to conceal their weapons, and coming to a *jammi* tree, asked it to guard them. They found a corpse and removing the skin, placed the weapons in that. This they tied to the trunk of the tree. When anyone came near the tree he saw snakes, scorpions, and devils, but the shepherd kings saw only their weapons. Because of this kind act on the part of the tree, it has since been considered sacred." It is likely that this legend accounts for domestic observances rather than "royal" cults. The reference to MBh 4.5 is obvious.

them.[47] Here the myth is truer than history: the link to this or that dynasty is itself largely fictive.

The ritual of Durgāpūjā and Vijayādaśamī, although it presents some variants from kingdom to kingdom, hardly informs us by itself.[48] Let us content ourselves with a few sufficiently differentiated examples that might help to answer the question that has been surfacing since the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, is the śamīpūjā substituted for a festival of the boundary temple when it is a question of a royal city, or is it added there? This double problem really arises only in the case of royal festivals. In the Tamil south, where Vijayādaśamī is the day for the Vaṉṉiyasurasaṃhāra, "the slaying of the demon Vaṉṉi," Navarātri passes almost unnoticed. In the "mixed" case of Rāmanātha-puram (capital of old Rāmnāḍ), where the Vijayādaśamī celebration is almost as lavish as the Dasarā celebration at Maisūr, Navarātri is also celebrated, and the tenth is explained as the day upon which, as a last resort, the demon Mahiṣa assumed the form of a vaṉṉimaram to be slain by the Goddess. The gold utsavamūrti from the royal temple is taken in procession, preceded by all the deities of the locality who attempt to slay the Buffalo before the Goddess does. But it is the royal goddess who fells with a single arrow the thin *Acacia arabica* that functions both as the śamī and the buffalo (personal observation, 1980). The tenth day thus crowns the goddess's victory by its enactment and by publicly presenting the golden statuette of the protecting deity in grand display.

Returning to the north, the main festivals, albeit in a more or less degraded state, can still be observed. The buffalo sacrifice notably tends to disappear, replaced by a goat or a sliced gourd (as is generally the case in Gujarat). The distinction between the festival in Jaipur and that in Udaipur in Rājasthān is still clearly discernible. These two capitals claim solar dynasty descent and their current family members try to keep their religiously defined royal prerogatives. At Udaipur in Mewar, the Navarātri festival formerly lasted eight days at the Ambāmātājī temple outside the city. The buffalo sacrifices took place on the first and last days at four in the morning. On other days, the goddess contented herself with goats. The king attended the sacrifice and offered the first buffalo. Since the ban on buffalo sacrifice, goats are offered during the eight days of the festival, but the first is always offered by the king or his chaplain. The buffalo on the last day is represented by a gourd. The Ambāmātājī temple is a royal temple, but located on the boundary of the capital, one of those temples whose modest character we have already noted in Orissa. The pūjārī and the executioner are Rājpūts. The eighth and last day of the festival is that of the slaying of Mahiṣāsura by the Goddess, if not the end of the festival itself. On the second day, a homa is lit by the Brahman priests (of local origin or from nearby) in the hall of the Udaipur palace devoted to this rite. Earlier the king had confided his sword to a Nāth *sādhu*, and during the festival members of the

[47]I cannot develop this theme here, but it is evident that the distinction between the lunar and solar dynasty has a starting point outside the epic ideology. It is not useless, it seems to me, to recall that the Vedic rājasūya ritual applied to the Kuru kings, as in the MBh.

[48]The śamīpūjā remains frequent in the old small principalities of South Kanara District. But I leave this aside since it would be necessary to introduce with it the complex relations between Krsna and the goddesses, and between the goddesses and the *bhūtas*. For other examples, cf. Biardeau 1981a, 1984. It is no longer necessary to return to the śamīpūjā of Solāpur. Cf. above, p. 32.

Nāth monastery watch over it, and thus over the kingdom—the sign of a particular link between the Rana of Udaipur and this sect. Grains are sown and two royal goddesses are brought into a small hall near the homa. One of these goddesses, confided throughout the year to the care of the Brahman guru of the royal family (a descendant of a guru who, according to legend, saved the founder of the lineage), is the kuladevī (who has no other name). She is represented by a stone stela engraved with a triśūla, itself covered with silver paper to make it augur well during the festival. During Navarātri, the Brahman guru comes to install it in the palace. The second goddess, Bāṇamātā, is placed in the same hall represented by a processional icon. The two divine forms are associated with the festival, but only the second will go out on the tenth day after the pūjā to the weapons. At that time, the homa is concluded and the seeds that have sprouted are pulled up and cast away. Finally, on the evening of the tenth day, the king and his chaplain, followed by a crowd, set off in a north-northeast direction with the processional icon of Bāṇamātā and proceed to the *khejra* tree[49] or, according to Sleeman, the *cheonkul*—that is, to a śamī, or what takes its place—where they perform the śamīpūjā while the rite of crossing the limit is replaced by the release of a blue jay (*nīlkaṇṭh*) commemorating the departure of Rāma. Bāṇamātā ("the Arrow") is placed at the foot of the tree, which is separated from the throng by a large cloth. The king and his chaplain, the only ones to enter the area between the cloth and trunk of the tree, address themselves—apparently indistinctly—to the statuette and the deified tree that they call Aparājitā, "the Unvanquished." The rite's secretive character indicates that it involves an imprecatory prayer against the enemies of the kingdom. Theoretically, this ritual on the tenth day opens the period of military expeditions, and people thus pray for the king's victory, while at the Ambāmātājī temple the goddess, slayer of the buffalo, has put an end to demonic assaults (of the past year) against the kingdom. The eighth day at the Ambāmātājī temple and the tenth day with the śamīpūjā in conclusion are thus complementary. The spring festival, which in villages is divided between two different but also complementary sites, is here celebrated at three distinct places, the last of which is necessary to the king as conqueror.

Without the prior study of the festivals of village tutelary goddesses, the unity of the whole could not have been perceived so clearly. That study always reveals a boundary-center structure whose components are indissociable once the respective roles of the cult of the center and the boundary are understood. The complementarity appeared from the outset in the Āndhra villages chosen as starting points for this study because the post bore witness to their unity.

The festival in Jaipur is also held at three clearly distinct places. While on the first day an oblation fire is lit in the temple of the City Palace, Navarātri is observed in the temple of Śilādevī (or more often, Kālī Mātā) at the Amber Palace—the fortified palace that marks the boundary of the fortifications at the edge of a ravine. The meal, consisting of goat mutton given every morning of the year to the goddess in her temple, is doubled during Navarātri to mark the festival, and completed by a goat at the final meal, one goat more being added each day. On the night of the eighth day (actually the night

[49]Cf. above, p. 302, and Sleeman (1915), 1, 213, with the note from Smith (p. 290 above), ibid.

of the seventh day to the eighth), buffalo and goats are sacrificed in the king's presence. By virtue of his legal acumen, the former King of Jaipur is considered to be at his private residence in his Amber Palace, as well as at the palace in the city of Jaipur; he is, in fact, president of the two "boards of trustees" that manage the two palaces and their temples. This makes it possible to maintain the fiction of the king's "private property": one can still sacrifice buffalo so long as it is not in a public place. During the solemn night, then, the rāja, as an officer of the Indian army in full dress uniform, looks from his stairway over the crowd of people that has invaded the court of his Amber Palace, controlled by a large presence of police. Following the immolation of a variable number of animals, which two Rājpūts take turns beheading with a single stroke of the *talvār* and amidst the greatest silence,[50] the heads are rapidly borne into the Śilādevī temple, where, immediately after the blood sacrifice, they are aligned, eyes closed, in front of her with a flickering lamp on each of them. Two women attempt to give the illusion of former *devadāsīs* by going around the maṇḍapa in the area of the heads. Certainly the persistence of this rite presupposes other arrangements: a royal goddess has the right to Brahman priests, and *śāktas* have been brought from Bengal, and then from Bihar, to ensure her worship. On the ninth day, when the highly excited crowd files past to bring offerings of wine and meat, it is the same śākta priests in red silk dhotis who receive these and offer them to the goddess. The latter is represented as Mahiṣamardinī, as she should be, and the asura who has the honor of remaining at her feet receives a part of the offerings of meat and alcohol. The name Śilādevī (the "goddess of the rock" or "at the rock") evokes the goddess in the *Harivaṃśa* who, as the sister of Viṣṇu, incarnates at the same time as he, and is killed by Kaṃsa who dashes her on a rock. This is the classical virgin goddess (but the local myth makes no allusion to her). In any case, she is Kālī.

No one, however, would have the idea that Navarātri ends after this majestic night. While the king is on parade at Amber, his chaplain replaces him from the first day of the festival at the Rose Palace (City Palace) for the bloodless rites that unfold until the morning of Vijayādaśamī. The chaplain installs an oblation fire in the small hall where the ancient weapons of the royal family are kept. Each morning he brings fire taken from a brazier he keeps lit throughout the festival in the *agnihotra* hall facing the small hall. He has sown sorghum in two earthen pots, and the goddess herself presides in the form of a metal pot filled with water and decorated with greenery. Each day following the homa, a pūjā is performed to the kuladevī in a different form. On the eighth day, the Goddess is Mahāgaurī, the kuladevī par excellence of the royal family, and the pūjā is performed in the larger agnihotra hall to nine young girls aged from three to eight, who are then fed, and to two boys below age thirteen. The nine little girls are the nine forms of the Goddess, and the two boys are Kālabhairava and Gaurabhairava, her guardians. Kālabhairava would here be the form of Viṣṇu (who is always of dark hue) and Gaurabhairava is the form of Śiva according to the śākta tradition such as it is described in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*. This ceremony is held in the morning following the night of the

[50]This famous silence at the moment of a sacrificial victim's immolation is not a myth. In 1974, I attended the celebration of Navarātri and Vijayādaśamī in Jaipur.

sacrifice at Amber (which is also counted as the eighth lunar day). On the same day (which is the ninth), the king goes to the Sītārāmadvāra temple to attend the recitation of the *Devī-māhātmya* and the final homa (*pūrṇāhuti*), for which the fire has been brought from the agnihotra hall in the palace. Is the king not Rāma's descendant? Once an opened coconut has been offered in the final homa fire, the fire is alowed to go out (just as in the agnihotra hall). On each half of the coconut one places a small oil lamp, for the broken coconut symbolizes a human sacrifice. The entire daily ritual of the homa is secret (without an audience) and is part of the privileged relationship that exists between the chaplain and his king thanks to the special dīkṣā that the king and his wife have received after a royal unction. The whole, with the visit to the ancestor and its atmosphere of a family festival, is like a royal replica of the village goddess festival that concerns the whole constituted by each village.

On the morning of the tenth day, the priest gathers up the ashes of the homa at the City Palace, pulls up the sorghum shoots, a few of which are strewn on the heads of those in attendance (the palace staff) as prasāda, and the pot representing the Goddess is put away. Following the mid-afternoon darbār and the pūjās (to weapons, thrones, and vehicles), the king and his chaplain set off at the appearance of the first star for Vijaya-garhi, where the śamīpūjā is to be conducted. This rite, like those held at the Rose Palace, is secret. Its symbolic meaning is only recalled here (cf. above): the śamī being of fire, it must restore fire to the royal weapons that have rusted during the monsoon. It is a *saṃskāra* of weapons, a "sacrament" restoring to the weapons their efficacy with a view to future conquest. There the festival ends.[51]

The triplicity of sites is confirmed, from Amber to Vijaya-garhi. The Sītārāma temple is included in the ritual of the City Palace, since it is there that one concludes the series of homas begun at the palace, before returning to the latter. This is a way to associate King Rāma and his wife with the festival of the guardian deity of the dynasty. But the continuity of the ritual is much more striking because of the existence of the buffalo sacrifices and the doubling of the royal presence thanks to the king's purohita. Moreover, a Rāma-līlā takes place every evening and ends with the destruction of Rāvaṇa's effigy, just as the village festival is accompanied by its "street theater." But these pageants—which are, incidentally, rudimentary—remain foreign to the ritual strictly speaking, even if they converge toward a single celebration, since Rāma would not have slain Rāvaṇa without the Goddess's aid.

With Maisūr (Mysore, in today's state of Karṇāṭaka), we return to the south, to the heart of the region where the buffalo sacrifice was probably most practiced. The most renowned śamīpūjā in the entire south is celebrated in the former capital of the Wodeyar kings (from Uḍayar, the title of a caste with Kṣatriya claims). In fact, the splendor of the darbār held the same day as the śamīpūjā has remained in all the memories. The darbār—which was also mentioned in Jaipur, where it has become sketchy and somewhat obsolete with the passing of time—is the ceremony at which all the princes and chiefs

[51]The situation in Rājasthān is, however, more complex because of the pyramid of royal rights that leads to a reduction of ritual functions held to be royal. There is, nevertheless, an exception: the śamīpūjā can only exist on the royal level, and it is celebrated on the day that all the vassals come to renew their allegiance to the king.

dependent on the sovereign had to be present and renew their allegiance to the king. The royal horse and elephant, the vehicles, the weapons, must also each in their manner pay allegiance to the sovereign and receive his benediction. All that, however, has been reduced to its simpler expression, but the śamīpūjā on the tenth day remains. One can in any case describe it as it is presently conducted, even after the death of the very pious King Chamaraja Wodeyar and the breaking up of the royal fortune.

It is important to adequately articulate the totality of the Navarātri and Vijayādaśamī in which the śamīpūjā figures. To the duality of shrines, the mountain temple to Cāmuṇḍī on Chamundi Hill and the small temple called Cāmuṇḍī Toṭṭi in the royal palace at the center of the city, is to be added the bannimaṇḍapa erected near a śamī[52] that was formerly on the capital's northern boundary (today on Bangalore Road, near St. Philomena's College). Moreover, the festival lasts not ten but fifteen days, from the first day after the new moon of Āśvin (September-October) until the next full moon. However, it is necessary to separate the now familiar module of ten days from the other five days. Only the key moments will be retained so as to avoid repetition, since the schema remains classical.

During the first ten days, the festival unfolds simultaneously at the Chamundi Hill temple and at the temple in the royal palace. The edifice at Chamundi Hill is oriented toward the east, and the main image of the goddess has eight arms, as does her processional icon. But the first of these is a Mahiṣamardinī, a "terrible" goddess like that at Amber. Her priests are Śaivabrāhmaṇas (the name here corresponds to that of gurukkaḷ in Tamilnadu), but they are usually called Brahmans. And, as we have come to recognize, that requires a certain status for the goddess, who receives a purely vegetarian worship in contrast to her mythic function as slayer of the buffalo. Furthermore, her name here is "etymologically" explained by her having slain two asuras named Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa ("Terrible" and "Severed Head," rather than "shaved"), and no longer by her victory over the buffalo.

The Durgāpūjā at this mountain temple begins with a Navarātri and Vijayādaśamī of the classical type. On the first day, after the rite of tying a protective string to all the actors in the festival, one installs the daily homa fire in the walled yāgaśālā along with nine jars (representing the goddess's nine forms), each covered with a coconut and with mango leaves. These nine jars are placed on banana leaves with a layer of grains of uncooked rice. For ten days they are entitled to a double pūjā. On the same first day, seeds of *Eleusine coracana* (*rāgi* in everyday language) are sown in a pot filled with earth and watered for their germination. The goddess is festively worshipped during this time with pūjā and copious, but vegetarian, naivedya. Stotras are recited for nine days: the *Lalitāṣṭottaraśatanāman* (the hundred and eight names of the Goddess), the *Lalitāsahasranāman* (her thousand names), and the *Lalitātriśatī* (her three hundred names). The DM appears to be unknown. On the tenth day, after nine identical days, the homa fire in the yāgaśālā is extinguished and the copper jars are removed, poured as abhiṣeka over the goddess, and given to the temple Brahmans to be preserved. Finally, the

[52]Kannada *bannimaram* = Tamil *vannimaram* = Skt. *śamī*. The dictionary by Kittel (1968) identifies it with *Prosopis spicigera* (Lin.) or with *Acacia ferruginea* (My.; Van Someren), s.v. banni, p. 1141.

sprouts of rāgi are uprooted and deposited in a nearby tank. All the protective strings (*kaṅkaṇa*) of the deities and officiating priests are removed. On the evening of the ninth day, the king comes to pay homage to the goddess.

The festival does not end there since it counts five additional days and, moreover, the past ten days have not included all the customary rites. But, before pursuing this, we should first consider what occurs at the palace temple where the festival is effectively concluded on the tenth day. In effect, Cāmuṇḍī Toṭṭi celebrates the Goddess in parallel.[53] There is neither a yāgaśālā nor daily homa, but Cāmuṇḍīśvarī, tutelary goddess of the royal line, receives a continuous pūjā, beginning on the first day in the small private sanctuary within the palace, where the purohita represents the king. The worship is accompanied by the recitation of various stotras (to the exclusion of the DM, it appears). The king's day is spent for the most part in the darbār hall,[54] where he receives homage, offerings, and supplications from different categories of subjects. The pūjā to the goddess, also held on the first day, cannot begin before pūjās have been done for the darbār hall, the Nine Planets (*navagraha*), and the throne, so that the king can take his place on it to receive those invited for the day.[55] The king's sword—which has evident symbolic links with the goddess, since it is kept in her sanctuary—is placed on the throne and remains there throughout the darbār. The effect is to invest the king with all his power, with the prerogatives and obligations that his responsibility entails. At the end of the afternoon, after the darbār, the king proceeds to Cāmuṇḍī's sanctuary to attend the pūjā and listen to the recitation of stotras. The evening darbār will in part be devoted to entertainments offered by the king to his visitors. From the second through the eighth day, the receptions in the darbār hall take place only in the evening.

On the morning of the seventh day, the goddess Sarasvatī is celebrated. The king is his own officiating priest in the same small sanctuary. On the eighth day—which is called Kālarātri—the victory of the goddess over Mahiṣāsura is the object of specific evening worship. This is the equivalent of the Mahāṣṭamī in Jaipur and of its buffalo sacrifice, but no details are given. It may consist of a small oblation fire with the offering of a gourd cut in pieces, but one finds that done elsewhere, and it is little likely that the rite would be repeated at this moment. The ninth day includes a pūjā to the royal weapons, to the king's elephant and horse, as well as to Lakṣmī, performed by the king himself. At the same time, a homa to Caṇḍī is offered, marking the end of Navarātri properly speaking. The king then goes successively to the temple at Chamundi Hill and to the temple of Jvalattripurasundarī at Uttanahalli (on which see below). On this evening the sovereign removes the protective string he has worn around his wrist since the first day, after having worshipped the Goddess in the three forms corresponding to the Trimūrti.

[53]I take into account both the information collected at Chamundi Hill from speaking with priests, and from the beginning of an article by B. Ramakrishna Rao (1921).

[54]*Darbār*, a Persian word that signifies, according to period and place, "the king and his court," "the hall of royal council." It is the location par excellence where day to day contact occurs between the king and his subjects. It is probably the equivalent of the ancient Skt. term *sabhā*.

[55]There is no question of guests from fashionable society, nor of tourists or foreign visitors, who are given a special darbār on the eleventh and twelfth days, when all the ritual aspects of Navarātri have come to an end.

The next day is then Vijayādaśamī, "the tenth day of the victorious goddess," with the varied mythic resonances that we examined earlier. In the morning, the royal weapons are carried in procession to the bannimaṇḍapa, while the king attends wrestling matches. At the end of the afternoon, the king sets out in grand procession to the bannimaṇḍapa (situated north of the palace). Seated in the *ambari*[56] of his elephant he takes the "royal way"—*rājamārga*, or, under its modern name, Sayaji Rao Road—accompanied by cavalry, infantry, lancers, police, guardsmen, and musicians. The bannimaṇḍapa is constructed near a śamī (*bannimaram*). Gunshots salute the rāja's departure from the palace and his arrival at the maṇḍapa: as many shots as his years (of age or reign?). The pūjā to the bannimaram—the śamīpūjā—is public, but only the king and his purohita are actors in it. The goddess is beyond doubt Śamī, she who destroys enemies—*śatrunāśinī*. The specifically ritual part of the festival has ended, which allows the king to shave for the first time since the festival's beginning and to bathe. There immediately follows a military parade lit by torches, as night has fallen. The king, mounted on a white horse, inspects his troops. The review is followed by a meal at the bannimaṇḍapa. Before returning to the palace, he cuts a branch of the śamī with his sword (of gold!) to place it, along with the sword, at the goddess's feet in her palace sanctuary. He sends his weapons to the palace in a palanquin and again mounts his elephant for the return. There does not seem to be a place in this evening for a "crossing the limit" rite, although the symbolic location of the śamī would meet its requirements. The festival on this day therefore only involves display and is without danger. The eleventh and twelfth days only include two brief darbārs, but the festival is considered to be over on the evening of the tenth day. During the ten days the palace feeds a grand number of Brahmans.

But at Chamundi Hill, the festival continues. In particular, the tenth day does not end with the completion of the yāgaśālā ritual. Very near the latter, as always in the temple's northeast corner, is a homa-kuṇḍa that would initially appear to be redundant after the fire offerings in the yāgaśālā. In fact, after the hasty end of the rites of the tenth day in the very early morning, a new fire is lit in this exterior homa-kuṇḍa (which is, however, still within the temple's enclosure). From nine in the morning to one in the afternoon, the fire is fed with clarified butter, sesame seeds, coconuts, bananas, sugar cane, and molasses. Finally one casts into the fire a gourd—*kuṣmāṇḍa*—whose pieces are coated with vermilion.

An offering—*bali*—of cooked rice is made to the eight directions, then one to the center, after having purified the ground with water and formulas. The goddess too is entitled to a bali of cooked rice. After this, the homa fire itself, which is a divinity, receives a maṅgalārati (the presentation of a display of lights). And the goddess's mūlavar and all the participants are provided with a protective poṭṭu for their foreheads made of soot from the fire that is mixed with oil.

The eleventh day features the grand chariot—*tēr*—procession that is more customarily held on the seventh or ninth day, before the end of the yāgaśālā rites. The goddess's processional icon is carried once around the temple on a platform by eight Brahmans,

[56]The term *howdah* is better known elsewhere. Either denotes the litter secured on an elephant in which one rides the animal. Cf. Yule and Burnell 1968, 17, s.v. ambaree.

after which they carry it thrice around the chariot before finally installing it on the tēr. At this point an interesting element of continuity between past and present deserves special mention. Formerly the king had to be present. The utsavamūrti was first placed on a pedestal near the tēr, facing the king. A priest carried the Navagrahas (Nine Planets, including the Sun and Moon) in procession on a tray. The king performed pūjā to them and placed the flowers given to him by the priest on the goddess's processional icon. After a brief worship, the priest gave prasāda to the king and the utsavamūrti was placed on the tēr. The king was naturally the first to pull the tēr, after which he departed. Today it is government officials of Maisūr (which is no longer a capital) who fulfill this function, beginning with the deputy collector. The chariot circles the temple once (there is only one possible route on the summit of the hill) preceded by musicians. It arrives at the gate of the temple at approximately three in the afternoon and remains there until five to receive homage from devotees. The utsavamūrti is then taken back into the temple.

The three subsequent days include only an ordinary pūjā in the temple, where it is clearly the fifteenth day, that of the full moon, that is awaited to celebrate the final ceremony of the *teppotsava,* "the float festival." A few hundred meters from the temple is a tank along side of which the priests take the processional mūrti, put it down, and offer it an abhiṣeka (sprinkling it with water from the tank) at about ten in the morning. The mūrti is left there till around six in the evening, where it can receive the adoration of devotees. Then, when night falls, the priests adorn the goddess and place her on a float that thrice circles the tank. She is then returned to the temple in a palanquin and, after a last maṅgalārati, the temple closes its doors at nine in the evening. This time, the festival has indeed come to an end.

However, the first phase of the festival, which unfolds in two or even three places with the banni included, lasts only ten days. The end of the yāgaśālā rites on the morning of the tenth day and that of Vijayādaśamī with its śamīpūjā on the evening of the same day could be readily seen as a possible conclusion of the festival, as would be the case elsewhere. But the order of this first phase is upset, notably because it doesn't include the chariot festival. The latter, which occurs on the eleventh day, after the celebration of the goddess's victory, appears to be a renewal of the ritual, this time limited to Chamundi Hill, and belonging to a second phase of the festival that begins on the tenth day with the new homa fire. It thus remains to account for this second phase and the displacement of the tēr procession.

The long sequence of homas outside the yāgaśālā that carry on immediately from those of the first ten days is addressed, say the Brahmans, simply to the Fire who is a god: Agnīśvara. He is also a god in all fires and particularly in oblation fires, but he is usually confined to receiving homas to make them ascend to the gods in heaven. What does this change in function, which is not immediately perceptible, signify?

Two elements, recontextualized by what we now know, suggest a clue. The final oblation made into this fire is a gourd cut in pieces and reddened with kumkum. At Maisūr, no one comments on this detail, but it is very clearly explained in any sanctuary of the royal goddess in Gujarat, for example, where animal sacrifices have long since given way to surrogates. Like the coconut, the kuṣmāṇḍa—a gourd or pumpkin—is the

substitute for a living being, indeed, "originally" a human being. The vermilion that deepens the color of the slices is intended to allay the suspicion of the goddess, who thinks she sees pieces of blood-soaked meat. There is little risk in affirming that the kuṣmāṇḍa is always the substitute for an animal victim, and of a carved up animal whose parts go to every beneficiary.[57] Cāmuṇḍī, however, is by axiom positioned as strictly vegetarian—which is always surprising for a "terrible" warrior goddess who slays demons. That is why one goes beyond the axiom by establishing Agnīśvara as recipient, but as an altogether intermediary recipient. He serves both as link and as screen between the goddess and the animal victim, the latter incarnating the "demon" in the rite. This Agni, when all is said and done, is not very far from Karuppu or the Maduraivīran of Aiyanār, nor is he far removed from Pōtu Rāju, Pōtta Rājā, Māriyamman's firepot, or the Agnivīran of Paccai Amman. Absolutely no longer the pure fire of the yāgaśālā, he approximates Agni *viśvabhuj*, he who eats everything, meat included.

Here this animal/asuric victim refers beyond itself, as does the asura of the myth. Devoured by the fire, it evokes the funeral pyre, and beyond that the cosmic conflagration, the necessary end of the world that is ritually reenacted each year to permit a new and purified world to be reborn. That is why—and this is the second element—one makes use of soot mixed with clarified butter or oil to mark the foreheads of participants with a black mark. It is the mark of protection that the fire of cosmic conflagration confers. It is also the trace of a meaning that defines the entire production, including the chariot procession the next day. The rite on the eleventh day is thus no more than the further development of this annihilating fire: the tēr of the grand procession that the king must set in motion lends the homa of the previous day its cyclic temporal dimension and orients the work of destruction toward the awaited renewal.[58] The chariot festival is, however, reduced to its simplest expression, probably because of the limitations of the terrain. Nothing indicates that the chariot itself would have to be symbolically burnt after its devastating course.[59] There, it is no more than a supplement to the fire of the previous day.[60] In Maisūr, the oblation fire outside the yāgaśālā lends meaning to the chariot procession or, more precisely, identifies the latter as the destruction of a world of living creatures.[61] Why this inversion and somewhat weakened reutilization of the chariot rite after the "cosmic" fire of the previous day?

We shall return to this point. But the end of the five supplementary days must also have meaning. Now, after three unoccupied days, the awaited float ceremony initially

[57]Is there some relation between this homa of a gourd daubed with vermilion and the *kusmāndahoma* of the Taittirīya school of the Black Yajurveda? The latter does not appear to include a gourd offering. Cf. Malamoud 1977, 70 ff.

[58]The putting to death of the demons of Tripura by Śiva, which serves as the mythic source of the chariot festival in some Śaivite temples in Tamilnadu, is never mentioned in this context. Cf. Reiniche 1979, 104 ff.

[59]Like that of Arjuna after the extermination of the Kauravas (MBh 9.62.8ff. [61.8ff.]).

[60]See L'Hernault's description of the chariot festival in Tiruvannāmalai (1999, 84-115). There, after the chariot's return to its place, with a small piece of its wood one makes a miniature fire from which to fashion black protection marks for the principal participants.

[61]In the MBh, the final massacre of the victorious Pāṇḍava camp (after the extermination of the Pāṇḍavas' vanquished opponents) in 10.1-16 (idem) is followed by a version of the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice by Śiva (10.17-18 [idem]).

looks like a pleasant triviality. It is the day of the full moon, and in its two phases the festival has from its beginning followed the course of the waxing moon. Whatever the mythic dynasties between which Hindu kings were distributed, the only one that was of interest to the Vedic ritual of royal consecration was the lunar dynasty: it alone symbolizes the transmigratory world since it refers to the moon that constantly waxes and wanes. A festival that covers the entire growth of the moon cannot end on a somber note of cosmic destruction. After the fashion of the purāṇas, it combines conflagration and water. The latter extinguishes the conflagration, but also brings a new world to germination (Viṣṇu reclining, the lotus growing from his navel and opening to allow Brahmā, the creator, to appear, according to the Sanskrit purāṇas). In a Śaivite temple the grand annual festival, the brahmotsava, concludes with a *tīrthavāri,* a bath of Śiva's astra in the regenerative water of a tank (which at the same time recalls the *avabhṛtha* of the Vedic sacrifice). In goddess temples, the concluding rite is most often the final procession of the deity's mobile form in the locality, where it receives aspersions of water refreshed and sanctified by the addition to it of yellow turmeric. In Maisūr, but also in other places, the Cāmuṇḍī of the hill will be taken on a raft over the calm waters of a tank at the end of the fifteenth day, no doubt at a time close to the rising of the moon. As is well known, the enlarged moon contains fertile humidity in the form of ambrosia, the gods' elixir of immortality. The floating of the raft on the water beneath the cool rays of the full moon is also a promise of rebirth and regained peace. It was noted that during the śamīpūjā the king did not "cross the limit"; in other words, he did not symbolically enact a departure for war. The śamī and the *teppam* thus turn the kingdom toward future peace rather than the perpetual renewal of wars (which was not merely mythical in traditional India).

It nonetheless remains that Cāmuṇḍī raises the same difficulty as many other goddesses met along the way: is she really vegetarian? To the problematic rite of the homa to Agnīśvara is added the simple fact that her mūlavar is a Mahiṣāmardinī, a slayer of the buffalo in action. Not only does that scarcely point to vegetarianism, but the buffalo sacrifice is well and truly made present. The putting to death of the victim emerges symbolically in the oblation of the gourd in the fire, that which makes it possible to celebrate the goddess's victory on her chariot while weakening the chariot's own symbolism. The asura's saṃhāra takes place the day before thanks to the good offices of Agni. Moreover, inside the temple and on the sanctuary's axis, in front of the flagpole and the balipīṭha a thick rectangular stone bears the relief of the goddess's *pādukas*. On each side is a prostrated figure, face to the ground and hands joined above the head. According to the Brahmans, they are the asuras Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa whom the goddess has slain. On both ends of the pādukas, scarcely decipherable reliefs appear to represent other overlapping figures, perhaps massacred warriors. To that is added the testimony of a non-Brahman informant who, outside the temple but within a few meters of the entrance, remarked to me that devotees come to a spot very nearby to offer votive cocks or goats, without the Brahmans or the goddess appearing to take notice. The executioner in this case is a Nāyakkar (a title possible for a Kurumba).

A few kilometers away, at the foot of another mountain, the village of Uttanahalli first presents to visitors the temple of the local goddess Jvalattripurasundarī ("Beauty of

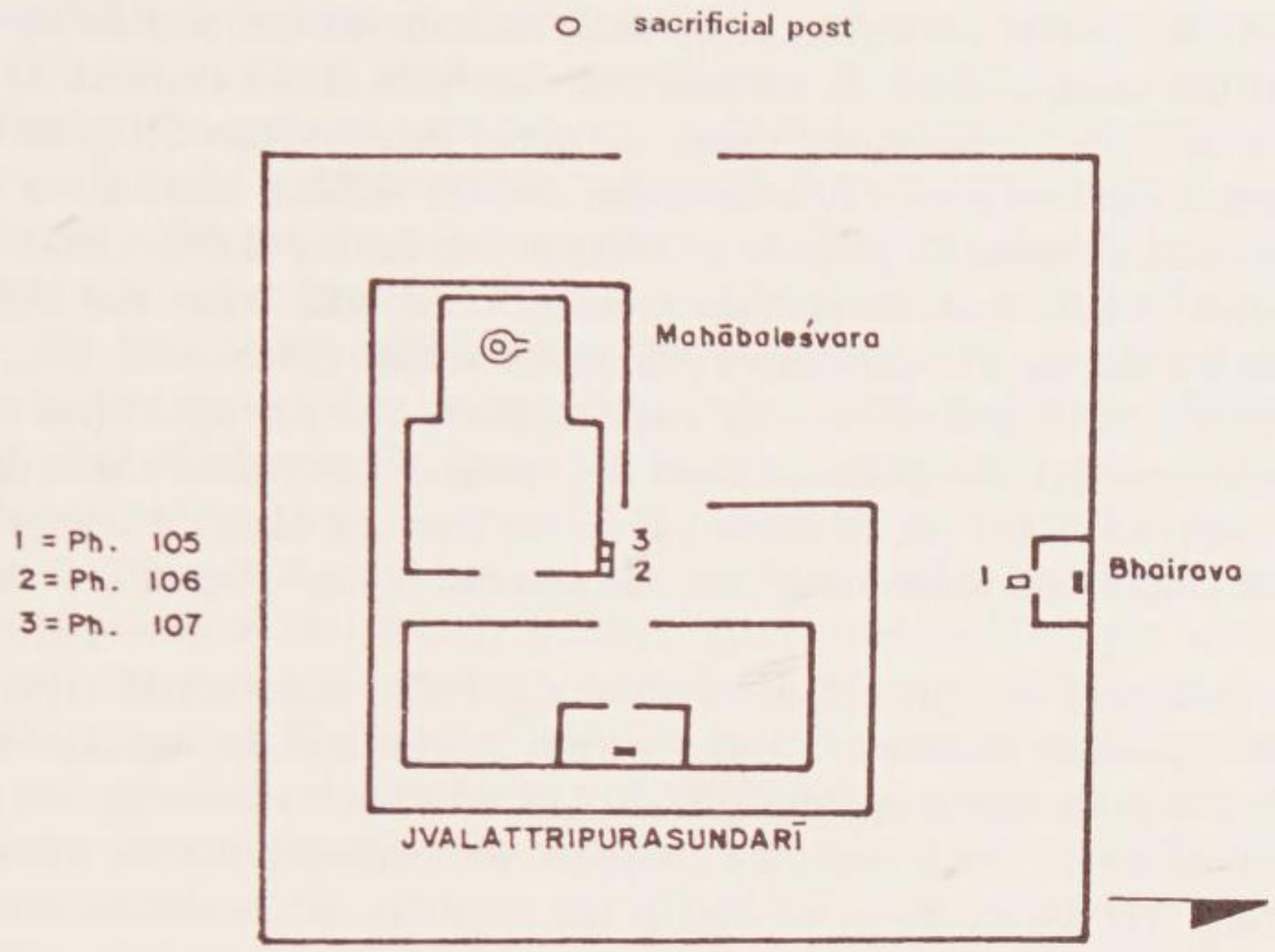

Fig. 10. Uttanahalli, temple of Jvalattripurasundarī (= Jvalāmukhī)

the Triple Fortress [of the asuras] That Burns"). The temple is oriented toward the west so as to face Cāmuṇḍī, who is Tripurasundarī's eldest sister. Within the first enclosure (there are two), a small liṅga shrine, set back with respect to the goddess's temple, is oriented toward the east. At the entrance to the outer enclosure, to its visitor's left, stands a rather coarsely hewn stone post. In the interior of this same enclosure, a pāduka stone similar to that of the Cāmuṇḍī temple is located in front of the small Bhairava shrine (fig. 10): The crude relief of a buffalo put to death at one end of the pādukas is complemented by a buffalo head at the other (plate 105). Another pāduka stone is on a cement pedestal inside the first enclosure against the north outer wall of the Śiva temple, near both its entrance and that of the temple to the goddess. On one end of the stone are portrayed warriors cutting their own throats, no doubt as an act of self-sacrifice to the goddess; the other end bears the head of a ram (Kurumba shepherds are predominant in the village) and a buffalo head on either side of the pādukas (plates 106 and 107).

Cāmuṇḍī had charged her younger sister to collect the blood of Raktabīja (the asura who, according to the DM, gives rise to new asuras every time one of his blood drops falls to the ground). The image of Jvalattripurasundarī has a long red tongue that brings her sanguinary task to mind. She has, however, only four arms, whereas Cāmuṇḍī has eight. The latter is therefore the warrior goddess, while her younger sister is characterized by her direct relation to the blood she drinks of her victim. One recognizes the Kālī of the DM (a text that no one mentions here). The two sisters quarrelled and Tripurasundarī wanted to leave by carrying off the mountain (Chamundi Hill). But her sister had assigned her the smaller mountain nearby, where her temple is now found. She thus

settled on a small knoll at the foot of the mountain. The link between the two goddesses is thus solidly attested by the myth, despite their separate shrines, and the bloodthirsty character of the younger sister is underscored. The post at the entrance is, in fact, intended for the tying of the goats, rams, and cocks that devotees bring as votive or other offerings. The executioner is a Kurumba, and the victims' heads go to him.

Tripurasundarī's customary priest is a Liṅgāyat. But for Navarātri, a Brahman from Chamundi Hill installs near the goddess a kalaśa filled with water and closed by a coconut, and for nine days he performs a pūjā to this kalaśa. On the ninth day, the King of Maisūr comes to Uttanahalli to visit Tripurasundarī after having visited her eldest sister. On the tenth day, the Brahman bears the kalaśa in procession within the temple enclosure, after which the pot of water and its coconut are kept for one year in the goddess's sanctuary; the water along with the coconut is then poured into the nearby tank.

The two goddesses are thus associated in the royal cult, and the DM myth is subjacent, though apparently unknown. It was necessary to minimize the bloodthirsty role of Cāmuṇḍī, which Brahmans are generally known to refuse (with the exception of tantric Brahmans in the north), but it could not disappear without depriving the whole festival of its meaning. Yet we are not at the end of our surprises. It remains to complete the comprehensive schema of the royal cult by evoking Tripurasundarī's own festival in February-March (that is, at a date near the spring equinox). The ritual is stronger than the ideological opposition to it, and it would be a shame to overlook it.

For the period of this two-day festival, fifteen of Cāmuṇḍī's Brahman priests come with their families to stay in Uttanahalli village. The splendor of the royal cult thus reaches the Tripurasundarī temple. The priests bring with them the large bronze utsavamūrti of the Uttanahalli goddess that is kept at Chamundi Hill. They adorn it and perform a pūjā to it, at which the king must be present; it is, furthermore, he who sees to the temple's maintenance throughout the year, except for the festival expenses. The king departs as soon as the first day's pūjā is concluded. The temple surroundings are filled with small shops and there is a crowd. In the evening, at eight o'clock, the utsavamūrti is taken in procession around the village and then around the temple, carried by a young girl of less than ten years (there are five girls who take over from each other, chosen from among the priests' daughters). The return to the temple takes place at one in the morning.

On the second day, after a pūjā, the utsavamūrti again sets out for Chamundi Hill, but the Brahmans remain within the temple, as well as the goddess's Liṅgāyat priest. The temple's door is closed. It is then that goats, rams, and cocks brought by devotees are immolated outside on the flat stones near the stone post. The first animal sacrifice must always be that of the village headman, a Kurumba Gauḍa. The victims are cooked and eaten on the spot by those who make the offerings. All the animals are sprinkled before their sacrifice with the goddess's tīrtha water (earlier presented to the goddess). So it also goes, finally, for the last animal, the buffalo. To kill it, a Mādiga comes from Maisūr; he is possessed by the goddess and dances before he beheads the buffalo. Until the official ban on buffalo sacrifice, the animal was attached like others to the post. Now the immolation takes place in the Mādiga quarter, behind and below the temple, at a place that is unmarked, making it difficult for the police to locate it. But the buffalo

sacrifice continues, as at so many other places. The animal is now purchased thanks to a collection made among the Mādigas (although members of other castes may contribute). It is, in any case, the Mādigas who consume the buffalo in its entirety, no part being offered to the goddess, who has cut off all communication with the outside.

Thus even here the goddess remains vegetarian. Even where sacrifices are practiced, Tripurasundarī with the long, broad red tongue does not attend the sacrifice. Her processional mūrti even leaves for Chamundi Hill before the animal offerings begin. It is evident that Brahmans would no longer attend these bloody rites, but that they must be present in the temple during the sacrifices is all the more significant. Notwithstanding all their denials, all their indignant candor before the hypothesis of a meat-offering to the goddess, their necessary presence in the temple is an attestation that the animal sacrifice also concerns the goddess and her priests, or rather the inferior goddess and the Brahman priests of the superior goddess. The young Brahman girl who carries the utsavamūrti incarnates in this role the goddess herself, an assuredly virgin goddess.[62] Who would not see here that the links are made to form a continuous chain from Cāmuṇḍī to the buffalo, passing by way of the Brahmans and the king but also by way of Cāmuṇḍī's younger sister? It is, however, probable that the recent shifting of the buffalo sacrifice from the door of the Uttanahalli temple to the Mādiga quarter contributes to the modification of its significance. Before the Tripurasundarī temple, whether one likes it or not, the sacrifice is still royal, linked to the complex of festivals in the Wodeyar capital and essential for the king's victory over the forces of adharma. The goddess, however, only goes in procession to the village, and the first victim sacrificed comes from the village headman. Moreover, Tripurasundarī is also locally named Uttanahalli Amman. The exit rites of Vijayādaśamī have already seemed oriented toward peace rather than martial expeditions. At the same time, the sacrifice could soon become no more than what is now practiced in the Mādiga quarter, no longer even a sacrifice by the locality. For all that, the castes present in the village are nowhere close to becoming vegetarian. But the first and second days of the festival could differ more and more. Is it not conceivable that one day with the king remaining absent, the Brahmans may decide to leave the temple at the end of the first day?

Thus Hindu royal ideology does not suffice to maintain sacrificial practices, and now the relationship would rather be reversed. In the absence of a martial context, royal ideology has a tendency to copy that of the Brahmans, whom this ideology hardly needs any longer to protect. In this redistribution of values and roles, the śamīpūjā equally detaches itself from its martial significance. Thanks to the śamī's permanent ambiguity, it can now impart peace rather than destruction. The buffalo sacrifice, for its part, also finds a place among low castes as well as in a village of landowners or a royal capital. It participates in the same ambiguity as the śamī from the time we begin to trace them, and the two continue to participate in the same socioreligious complex. The śamī remains posted at the northern boundary of the city, but to ensure peace. Meanwhile the buffalo is pushed farther back and outside the boundaries (quite possibly it made a

[62]In the case of goddesses in Tamilnadu whose virginity and marriage are both attested in their cult, although there may be hesitation to affirm one state or the other, never has a young girl been associated with the goddess in the fashion of the kumārīs in north India.

presence at the Chamundi Hill temple in earlier times) where its continued sacrifice, consigned to the care of Mādigas, ensures the ongoing function of the Goddess. But what is strained despite all, and one cannot close one's eyes to this fact, is the link between upper and lower castes, as well as the complementarity of the king and the Brahman.[63]

[63]I will not discuss here the impact of Vedāntic or other monasteries that have not ceased to work beside kings for the cessation of animal sacrifices.

Conclusion

One of the myths created by contemporary science—which wants to be critical, freed from any apologetic concerns, and attentive to the specificity of each socioreligious ensemble—certainly comes from the duality of approaches among scholars. The opposition, however, is no longer simply between the historicizing philologist and the more or less structuralist ethnologist, as between the founding fathers of French structuralism, Georges Dumézil as philologist and Claude Lévi-Strauss as ethnographer.[1] Before being one of method, the gap is in the object of study. There are texts with more or less remote dates, and there are contemporary people directly accessible to observation whose relation to ancient texts is problematic. This epistemological situation becomes more radical and deeply affects the object of study when it is a question of *one* civilization three thousand years old such as that of India, where the study of texts and data from contemporary observation strive in vain to superimpose themselves and result only in antagonism. History as such does not account for this failure. The India of the Brahmans—that of texts made highly venerable through their great age and their authors—and the India of villages where the impact of the West looks reduced at first sight, and which their Brahmans have partially abandoned, do not intersect: "popular" Hinduism and that of the Brahman castes have little in common, to say the least. This is serious, but who would think of denying it? Nevertheless, beyond appearances a kind of unity, if not an identity, surfaces between the India of the texts and that of the conceptions related to daily life even today, but also between the socioreligious practices of diverse regions. Some scholars still claim that Hinduism is nothing but a "mosaic." The temptation to oppose the two worlds, the theoretical and the real, is reinforced and is seemingly justifiable a priori by considerations that cannot be taken lightly: broadly speaking, the peopling of India obliged Dravidians and Aryans to live together, and this could be the cause of certain cleavages, even if it were socially necessary to compromise. On the other hand, the Brahmans (Aryans or Dravidians? One still hesitates to answer) have a conception of the pure and the impure that is concretized notably in the dietary opposi-

[1]Of course, and without doubt because he is and wants to be a philologist, Dumézil continues to historicize without knowing it, but he has nevertheless transformed the field of philology through his manner of doing so. Critical analysis of his work now refers to the history of the epistemology of the human sciences.

tion between pure vegetarianism and meat-eating. This opposition has as a corollary the opposition between vegetarian and animal-sacrificing modes of worship. Finally, and perhaps related to all of this, the Hindu pantheon is divided into gods and goddesses—into pure, vegetarian superior gods and impure goddesses fond of meat, although the observed reality would not be so simple. In any case, this opposition is no longer one between ancient texts and contemporary practice, since the Brahmans of the Vedic texts officiated at solemn sacrifices where animal victims were the rule. Among the ancient texts those that prescribe sacrifice are distinct from those that oppose it to renunciation. There is thus opposition already within the Vedic religious literature.

The present study has not insisted on historical depth as an evident factor of change, although it has not neglected the points of reference that history can provide. The study also did not attempt to deny diversity and the impossibility of making the ancient brahmanical ideal coincide with the reality of popular Hinduism today. Short of being able to trace an evolution, even a slow one, it prefers to speak of transformation in the structuralist manner rather than of changes. In other words, its object is to find the unifying fabric underlying diversity in both time and space, and the socioreligious continuity beneath the divergence of statuses, beliefs, and rites. Between, on the one hand, theoretical and didactic texts, but also mythical[2] texts, and actual practices on the other, there is no fundamental rupture. The constant oppositions are to be understood in terms of complementarity, not as so many breaks in continuity. Finally, the supposed dichotomies become more or less blurred at each attempt to clarify them. One category always somewhat overlaps its opposite, perhaps simply because hierarchy is fashioned to be contested in detail even if it is accepted as a system of the whole.

The relation between the Goddess and her guardian, at once victim and devotee, brother, seducing husband, or "demonic" son, has provided the mooring point for this theoretical discussion in both the analysis of precise and observable facts *and* in the analysis of their textual antecedents. In this context the Goddess is always the guardian deity of a given village; she watches over its boundary and/or is at its center to ward off calamities and to assure the village's internal order, which, in a village as in a royal capital, bears the name of dharma. She often becomes two goddesses, the one in the center (generally Māriyamman̲) and the one at the boundary (one or another form of Kālī), the second being always subordinate to the first. It is uniquely this protective goddess who is provided in front of her modest sanctuary with an inferior god facing her and devoted to her service. In Āndhra, this inferior god, named Pōtu Rāju, produces a double of himself, on the one hand, to occupy the central position alone, and, on the other, to remain on guard before the goddess of the boundary. Pōtu Rāju was subject to a triple identification:

— by his name, with the Buffalo, king of the asuras, whom the goddess was deputed by the gods to vanquish, at least in the myth of the DM, which, however, does not seem to be known in Āndhra. Not a single informant in Āndhra, whether Brahman or

[2]There is no question here of conforming to the Dumézilian distinction between mythology (as concerning Vedic gods) and epic (or "heroic times"). The epic is myth, as much as are the mythic fragments or episodes of the Vedic hymns and Brāhmanas. Gods and men intermingle therein, weaving one and the same account in which the hidden meaning takes the lead.

untouchable, is aware of Pōtu Rāju's identity with the Buffalo, even though in Telugu his name signifies Buffalo King, an asura of pan-Indian renown as the practice of the buffalo sacrifice confirms.

— by his form, the most specific being that of a small wooden post with a head separated from the shaft by a kind of ring. This does not exclude other forms, such as the aniconic stone erected to Bhairava, but the post seems to be his most usual representation and the most consummate (Bhairava notably is the product of a more classical iconography and must have been brought from another temple fallen to ruins). As unexpected as the transformation of the Vedic sacrificial post into an inferior god posted before the Goddess may be, one must no doubt see in Pōtu Rāju a stylized form and a reemployment of the Vedic post. Rather than resuming the "demonstrations" attempted in the course of this study, it is important first to simplify by pushing the identification with the Vedic context further. This has only become possible on the basis of the numerous comparisons that we have had to make. In effect, it is at first glance surprising that this guardian deity would be deployed in front of a goddess who is herself guardian of a village, whereas the otherwise superior god, an avatāra of Viṣṇu or a liṅga, is guarded in his sanctuary by a Kṣetrapāla. Before justifying this god-goddess dichotomy, one can seek the Vedic equivalent of the Goddess in the presence of the sacrificial post, or again, the part of the Vedic schema that is transformed into the Goddess. It is logical that the structural complement of the post would be the vedi, the sacrificial altar, and notably, beyond the three principal altars of the solemn sacrifice, the uttara-vedi, which bears the oblation fire for animal sacrifices and finds itself for this purpose near the post. The vedi is assimilated to the Earth, herself a goddess involved in the sacrifice, for whom ultimately it is performed. Thus the Vedic post, transferred into temple Hinduism, would quite normally be associated with the Goddess there. It will next be necessary to clarify why this was done above all in popular cults.[3]

— finally, by the material, the ubiquitous śamī, which, associated with fire in Vedic literature and cult, reappears as demon and also goddess, but provides as well the wood from which Pōtu Rāju is fashioned, with the invention along the way of plausible botanical substitutes.

But Pōtu Rāju is only one transformation among others, perhaps the most legible because of his form's relationship to that of the Vedic post. Beyond that, it was indeed necessary to recognize so many figures of the same Vedic post in the form of the stone post appearing before goddesses in Tamilnadu; in impalement stakes, instruments of at least symbolic torture (which the myth above all presented as such); in the mobile and immobile posts of Māriyamman in Kongunad; and in a few more remote and even

[3]Perhaps this structural link between the vedi and the yūpa, which reappears in the temples of village goddesses, furnishes us with at least one element in the explanation of the poverty of these temples. The economic argument does not suffice to account for it, since landowners could well have assumed greater expenses as sources of merit and social prestige, and also because the boundary temples of royal capitals are also all modest. Pōtu Rāju is constructed of a resistant wood and will last longer than the temple, which must be repaired from time to time . . . or even left without a roof thanks to a mythical account produced for the circumstance. Now in the context of the Vedic sacrifice, nothing on the sacrificial area should leave a trace and the post alone remains in place until its natural dissolution.

anthropomorphic posts in the extreme south of Tamilnadu. It is naturally the cult, and particularly the post's constant association in all its forms with blood sacrifices, but also the reemployment of elements of royal sacrifice such as that of the horse (mainly in Kongunad), that made this recognition possible. Being such, the post could embody other asuric figures, for example the Kāttavarāyaṉ associated with Māriyammaṉ in Tanjavur, beneath whom surfaces the Arjuna Kārtavīrya and Reṇukā of the epic-purāṇic myth, a classical if not a Vedic reference. In a less easily identifiable form, the myth would then allow one to find behind the impalement stake the same Vedic post associated with blood sacrifice by a return to the sacrificial area from the battlefield.

This Goddess-"demon"/inferior god pair, even though it unifies actual forms of worship that vary greatly in appearance, also gives rise to some problems.

In conformity with the cardinal principle that would have gods be vegetarian and goddesses be meat-eating, the goddess of the boundary, and even the goddess at the village center, is straightway considered to be meat-eating, whereas Pōtu Rāju would be vegetarian under the same rubric as Rāma[4] because he is male. In fact, it is all a matter of status and the process of hierarchization can be indefinitely repeated; but below the goddess, male deities are rather "demons," asuras who perpetually fail in their efforts to take control of the world and are subjugated. In any case, between the grāmadevatā in Āndhra and her guardian post there is no opposition as regards diet. Apparently all animal victims are fully consumed by the offerers; only the buffalo's head is offered to the goddess outside her temple before being removed. As the food offered to the goddess normally goes to the priest, who is himself not vegetarian, it is probable that he receives his portion of meat in his own community. At the boundary, it is difficult to say whether the goddess is meat-eating, although she at least takes an interest in the buffalo sacrifice performed in front of her sanctuary. As for Pōtu Rāju, it is also the proximity of the immolated animal rather than the meal itself that can provide an indication of his preference. Sometimes the victim is beheaded between the goddess and Pōtu Rāju, and sometimes this occurs behind the post, as if the latter would serve as a screen or intermediate beneficiary between the animal and the goddess. More than once, on the basis of informants' descriptions, I had the impression that, on the one hand, in buffalo sacrifices, victims other than the buffalo were not offered to the goddess, but that at least a portion could go to Pōtu Rāju; and, on the other hand, that the victims of votive offerings made by individuals during the year could also have been offered to Pōtu Rāju. The latter has his devotees, and in some cases one prefers to address oneself to him. Moreover, the pole, the godling's movable form, accompanies the buffalo on its last march to the sacrificial site. Under his pipal he imperturbably attends the animal's immolation, while the goddess's temporary image, which had followed the procession, will be destroyed after the buffalo has been put to death.

Thus the post-god's subordination to the goddess is in this case not expressed by diet. Even should the local collectivity be unaware of it, the myth distinguishes the Goddess delegated by the gods to subjugate the king of asuras, the king of agitators, from this post-god who owes his privilege of remaining before the Goddess as her vigilant devotee

[4]Cf. Herrenschmidt 1978, p. 132, who notes this with reservations.

to his (sacrificial) death at her hands (unless he submits to time while doing so). A process of the same kind is already at work in the DM when Caṇḍī creates Kālī to have her undertake tasks that appear too impure for her to do herself. That must imply that once the demon has been deified or converted to the cause of the gods, he is charged by the Goddess to carry out those too impure and bloody tasks that can nonetheless entail the maintenance of dharma. One already sees the possibility developing for the Goddess to withdraw into her sanctuary, severing all contact with base works and leaving them to those she has subjugated. This is what takes place at Māriyamman̲ temples, where the goddess is increasingly removed and cut off from blood sacrifices, indeed, where animal victims completely disappear. This withdrawal of the goddess signifies increasing purity, a rising status, a cult in which at least once a year the services of a Brahman (gurukkaḷ) are required. The Goddess imitates the superior gods without ever abandoning her function. The dominant castes who worship her do not for all that become vegetarians, but the elevation of their goddess's status implies a betterment of their own. They will always have an inferior god, Pōtu Rāju, Kāttavarāyan̲, or Kar̲uppu, not to speak of others, to whom to offer animal victims as they will. The benefit of these offerings will always go back to the goddess who will rain her blessings on the offerer.

Another element, supposedly indisputable, is also not as stable as it appears: the warrior goddess, protectress of the village, must be, following the example of the DM (or of the *Harivaṃśa*), a virgin goddess. This is both what most opposes her to the warrior god and what draws her nearer by virtue of the ascesis she thus accumulates. The rule is respected in Āndhra and the problem is clearly resolved: Pōtu Rāju is the grāmadevatās' younger brother. The goddesses need no other defender. No kinship ties exist between the village goddess and the form of Viṣṇu, generally Rāma, present in the same village. It is already much less clear when it comes to Paccai Amman̲, Viṣṇu's sister who by the same token appears to be the wife of Śiva, thus a form of Pārvatī. But her link with Agnivīra, who accompanies her during the firewalk, is never specified. Agnivīra, another demon she vanquished thanks to the munis roused by Viṣṇu, could also be a husband, or at least a suitor. In any case, the goddess's annual festival includes the marriage of Subrahmaṇya, her son, but the latter is also the son of the licentious Agni, who pursued the virtuous wives of the ṛṣis with ardor. A fermata never to be broken off.

But Māriyamman̲ truly delights in vagueness, all the more so as her identity in the lower Kāverī valley is still less clear than in Kongunad. In Tanjavur, her relationship with Kāttavarāyan̲ varies: she can even recognize him as her son and because of that accord him favored treatment. Kar̲uppu, who appears discreetly at the side of Kāttavarāyan̲ in a position inferior to his, could be the demonic god devoted to the most impure tasks, among which is the "consumption" of votive animal victims. He goes as far as to replace the former on the impalement stake. Perhaps he is then only his double. In Kongunad Kāttavarāyan̲ has disappeared and Kar̲uppu assumes the entire space associated or identified with the post, but he is again doubled in the form of another partner of Māriyamman̲, the pūcaṭṭi fire. In this region close to Mahārāṣṭra, the Reṇukā myth remains subjacent to the story of Māriyamman̲. The only "marriage" to be ritually represented is probably that of the goddess and the post(-buffalo). But the fire may evoke Jamadagni, that fiery Brahman who ordered his wife beheaded before bringing

her back to life, but who had to die at the hands of the Kṣatriya Kārtavīrya (who is no longer in question). Villagers and Māriyamman̲'s priests cannot say whether Māriyamman̲ is married or a virgin. Even though she is attired as a widow during the annual festival, no one looks on her as such. Everything takes place as if the collective consciousness refuses to answer this embarrassing question. In the course of my inquiries, only one gurukkaḷ came out with the "truth" in the form of a text that came not from him.

The popular goddess, then, the grāmadevatā, is never clearly Viṣṇu's unmarried sister. Sometimes every link with Viṣṇu disappears, or if it emerges in consciousness, then Śiva becomes Viṣṇu's brother-in-law, the goddess's husband. But the Goddess can also be the modern (?) and popular reappearance of a personage from classical mythology, the princess Reṇukā who, to her misfortune and that of the Earth (they are one), had to marry a Brahman. She is torn between her Brahman husband and the latter's princely aggressor (Ka̲ruppu, and no longer Kārtavīrya), and finally remains without a husband throughout the year in her temple; she grapples with the two only during the temple festival, at which time she triumphs over her two tyrants and thus reestablishes the order of the world. In front of her temple there is a post resembling Pōtu Rāju, but also the impalement stake found in Tanjavur where Ka̲ruppu would sometimes replace Kāttavarāya̲n. I would be tempted here to take up the Lévi-Straussian expression of "bricolage" for such mythic creations that employ preexisting materials—themselves too for the most part mythic, unless they would be ritual—and transform them to obtain homologous structures centering on the Goddess. Even the epic Draupadī is drawn into this movement and is assigned a rather more anthropomorphic and asuric Pōtta Rājā, to whom one eventually ascribes kinship relations with the Pāṇḍavas. Though her temple belongs first of all to Dharmarājā, the eldest of her husbands, popular consciousness dedicates it to her. The Draupadī festival sees the goddess's chariot presiding over the closing firewalk after it has crushed the thighs of Duryodhana, the epic king of asuras. She too is martial and provided with her asuric devotee (who has definitely ceased to eat meat).

The homology of the current structures of myths and rites concerning the Goddess is probably not confined to the modern period. The already extreme diversity of concrete realizations cannot explain the structural unity of the ensemble. If there is bricolage, it is oriented by a comprehensive conception that leaves it to choose among nearly unlimited variations drawn from Vedic and classical sources of great richness. As has been shown, it is a case of something more than the purely geographical diffusion of forms with their transformations and reinterpretations following laws of proximity, or the chance migrations of particular human groups.

One has still more convincing evidence of this when a vertical filiation is added to the horizontal unity, both from the upper to lower reaches of society and on through the centuries. From the outset, the texts attest abundantly to the presence and symbolism of the sacrificial post, of which we deliberately leave aside here other Hindu or Buddhist utilizations. Always in the texts of the Vedic period the fire-śamī pair is employed in the myths as in the rites. It already helps us to reinterpret the myth of Purūravas and Urvaśī. These different elements can be recognized in the post-with-buffalo of Āndhra and in all the mythico-ritual variants that are centered on it. It no doubt remains difficult to understand how the yūpa becomes a buffalo. But the transformation could be ancient,

should it prove that the goddess, who is herself associated with the buffalo, issued from the sacrificial vedi, this Goddess whom the iconography shows confronted by a Buffalo from the beginning of our era. Finally, another element of continuity: the quite unexpected emergence in Kongunad of irrefutable fragments of the royal ritual of the horse sacrifice in the annual festival of the complementary goddesses Māriyamman̲ and Kālī, where once again the post is found, and precisely a post from the aśvamedha.[5] The transformation of the king's principal wife—*mahiṣī*—into a warrior goddess and that of the sacrificial horse into a buffalo—*mahiṣa*—is not necessarily popular. One might even think that the presence of a Brahman gurukkaḷ at the time of certain rites during the Goddess's annual festival is not necessarily a recent accretion, but the actual form taken by Brahman participation in this popular cult. Who brought about this transformation? Why? Evidently, the complex of beliefs has changed. A sacrificial system in which the deities participated in a wholly abstract manner opened up into an array of superior and inferior gods within which the "Goddess function" appeared. There is no reason to think that the Brahmans did not play a determining role in this redistribution of the pantheon. The latter, which seems to have been in progress when the MBh was composed, gives the founding charter of Hinduism by supposing it to be preformed in the Vedic texts. In the epic, śūdras and women received new religious, if not social, rights. In brief, the problem of historical and social continuity would have already been posed in that period. Yet there is always a way to feel that one is at the top of the hierarchy or at the bottom, or that one is never entirely on top nor entirely at the bottom of society. As for the median zones, they have probably quarreled for a very long time about the range of rules in which their fates are played out.

This is not the place to raise the problem of the warrior Goddess's position among the gods, notably along side those avatāras of Viṣṇu who are incarnated on earth to wage war. The question is all the more troubling since the avatāra and the Goddess saw their respective contours and connections take shape at roughly the same time. It is thus better to consider the question separately. What matters here is the place that the Goddess occupies in the village pantheon in comparison with that of the great gods. It is evident that they are not on the same plane. This is particularly clear when the grāmadevatā neighbors a pilgrimage temple dedicated to a form of Viṣṇu (the Narasiṃhas of Āndhra) or of Śiva (for example, Kailāsanātha in Kongunad). Apart from the god being strictly vegetarian while the goddess is not, with the nuances already underlined, each has his or her domain and area of jurisdiction, and these do not intersect. Around or in front of a temple to Viṣṇu or Śiva, a quadrilateral traces the route of the large processional chariot that once a year takes out the god's ambulatory icon. This quadrilaterality, punctuated at the four corners by platforms that enable the deity to stop and receive offerings, is the symbol of the whole Earth. One is not precluded from recognizing in this the form of the uttara-vedi, with its quadruple spatial orientation that is also already a symbol of the Earth, that is, of the realm of the sacrificing king. The MBh battlefield is also assimilated to this quadrilateral (though it is not certain whether the identification

[5]The discovery of "horse sacrifices" in Kongunad has retrospectively helped to clarify the meaning of elements gathered elsewhere: the buffalo's "wandering," cedil posts mounted on wheels to make the round of a field, the asuras Amban̲, Ambakan̲, Ambalīkan̲, etc.

would be altogether conscious at that time). Also, when anyone living in the region (status permitting) visits Viṣṇu or Śiva as a pilgrim on the day of his temple festival, he does so as a "world citizen" and as a consequence of a personal vow. He is both devotee and beggar, or he comes to offer thanks for a granted boon.

One could come to offer a cock or goat to the village goddess for a similar object, in which case the god and goddess are distinguished only by the vegetarian/nonvegetarian, superior/inferior opposition, and no doubt by the status of the offerer. But the grāmadevatā's annual festival, with or without a buffalo sacrifice, is a matter for the entire village, just as an epidemic or a drought that afflicts the village entails at least the promise of a collective offering to the same goddess, never to the superior god, even if the latter is one of the village's deities. The goddess's procession covers, in principle, the circumference of the village (or its roads: but onlookers link it more readily to the boundary, which belongs to the notion of the goddess and not only to her sanctuary). Everything thus transpires as if there were a village cult, a festival at which the whole village, led by the headman, is the sacrificer, or again, to employ a sociological language,[6] as if the village were a worshipping unity when it is a matter of celebrating its guardian goddess. In other words, the god and the goddess are opposed as the universal to the local, and it is in this that the goddess would fall within the province of so-called popular Hinduism. The facts I have collected are not precise enough to confirm the notion of a village cult on the basis of an enumeration of participating and abstaining castes. It seems quite certain that the landowning castes would be the first ones concerned and that the village headman, a landowner, would preside over the festival. It is they too who pay the greater part of a festival's expenses. But do they not, at least in principle, have part of their lands in the village thereby placed under the goddess's special protection? These observations, however, can only remain very empirical and aleatory. Less so is the persistent "marking," mentioned *everywhere,* of two points of the village: its center and boundary (as if the latter did not have at least four spatial orientations). Pōtu Rāju is at the center alone beneath his tree, and on the boundary facing the grāmadevatā. Māriyamman is at the center, Kālī on the boundary, the one turned eastward, the other toward the north. Within this configuration is included above all the habitat, but when one does away with the terra-cotta effigies and the buffalo's head, it is clearly beyond the residential area properly speaking. There is thus no doubt that the cult of the Goddess—whether that of the village or of the royal capital—has a rapport with a spatial unity that pertains to human settlement, let us say a social unity more than a territorial one. It is not a question here of changing the terminology to evade the debate among anthropologists and classical Indologists regarding the secondary and nonstructuring character of territory in Indian society. It is no doubt true that "village" is never a rigorously demarcated figure inscribed on the ground that would refer ipso facto to a worshipping unity; nor would an indissociable human group refer to this unity at the same time as to the territory. But if it is true that there exists a local worshipping unity that transcends lineages and local caste groups to theoretically unite

[6]Herrenschmidt 1981 contests the idea of "l'unité de culte" (here, translated as "worshipping unity") because it would imply a territorial unity and not a social unity like the local group, whereas in India one would only arrive at the territory through the mediation of its inhabitants. Cf. above, p. 244, n. 203.

all the inhabitants of a village, it is important to know what this worshipping unity really corresponds to. Perhaps the sociologist as such must admit his inability to bring out the pertinent level of reality.

In the course of the concrete analyses undertaken throughout this volume, two points continually emerged that will be helpful in approaching this aporia from a different perspective. On the one hand, the essentially symbolic spatial configuration that was just mentioned is ineluctable. The shifting of this configuration relative to the concrete settlement cannot always be attributed to the vicissitudes of local history, even if the latter would have played a sometimes discernible role. There are, for example, cases where Māriyamman and Kālī temples in Kongunad are so near each other that their formal center-boundary relation can only be symbolic. There is, then, in the organization of Hindu worship a necessity for *ideological* order that compels the enunciation of a structured local unity, defined as an interior in opposition to an exterior. It matters little that a house would be situated outside this boundary if the family living in it feels that it is a beneficiary of worshipping the local goddess. Conversely, this or that local caste group that prefers to think it is extraneous to this cult for reasons that are generally unknown (to us?) can exist within this boundary, which is never concretized by a continuous line on the ground, but only at one or more points: the sites of the boundary goddesses's sanctuaries.

On the other hand, it has become evident that the allegedly popular and nonbrahmanical cults derive the essential part of their substance and structure from classical pan-Indian myths and rituals. One can thus expect them to be solidary with the most traditional Hindu concepts. As concerns the Goddess, and notably the local goddess, there is one concept in particular that compels recognition: that of *saṃsāra,* the "world of transmigration."[7] In classical Hinduism, the opposition between transmigration and liberation as the two paths of individual destiny was doubled by the opposition between the world of *saṃsāra* and the world of liberation, with cosmic levels linking a cyclical transmigration to an ultimate encompassing sphere where the supreme divinity gathers into his immutable essence for eternity all those who are liberated from repeated births. But contrary to what the hierarchy of values would lead one to believe, it is the world of transmigration that very naturally assumes the highest importance for the living man. The perpetuity of saṃsāra must be assured, whatever the individual destiny that writes itself into this framework.

The greatest dimension of cosmic transmigration to concern man is that which encompasses the three worlds of earth, heaven, and the infernal regions in a perpetual renewal of their order. But it is only on earth that individual transmigration is decided, since it is only there the individual can act and perform rites. The phenomenon that each human group constitutes itself at the center of the world is too universally widespread for one to have difficulty understanding the Hindu conception on this point: a kingdom is symbolically the Earth and a royal capital has the value of being the center of the world. Mutatis mutandis, a village is also organized at the center of the relative world,

[7]Let us note that one concurs here in purely Hindu terms with what Hocart designates by a too general word: life. On this subject cf. the remarks by R. Needham in Hocart 1978, 24 ff.

although it is known to be encompassed by a kingdom or by a more or less complex meshing of principalities. That is the nearest terrestrial image, cultwise the most supple and symbolically the most ancient, of the world of transmigration whose prosperity and perpetuity it is so important to ensure. It is this image upon which human activity can be effectively exercised. Correlatively, the year as a liturgical unit of time (which it already was in Vedic ritual) substitutes for the cosmic cycle, and serves as the model for the annual festival that still largely dominates the worship of the local goddess. The parcelization of cultic space into "village" unities has the effect of linking a particular Māriyamman̲ to one particular place rather than to another. Conversely, there is a tendency to degrade goddesses of the space outside the village, and one aspect of the cosmic order is that the Goddess dwells in the sanctuary destined for her. Should she wander elsewhere, she would not be welcome.

Finally, for the post that has served as our connective thread, the last word remains. Alone at the center of the village in Āndhra under the name of Pōtu Rāju, it reappears logically enough in front of Māriyamman̲ temples in the center of many Tamil villages in such forms as an impalement stake with hooks or a forked post. In this central position, it recovers its triple Vedic function as essential sacrificial instrument, world axis, and substitute for puruṣa—that is to say here, for the sacrificing village. More than ever it is the symbol that holds everything forever in place. For this study of the Goddess, it is the post that has brought out most clearly the solidarity between the center and the boundary of that which it is best to call the village as a worshipping unity, as it was always the place of all organized social life.

The same theme on occasion united the royal and village levels of worship, even though a rite like the śamīpūjā would be uniquely linked to the royal capital. However, the two very distinct dates for the celebration of the Goddess tend to introduce two levels of the Goddess's worship: the spring festival (which is actually spread over four or five months between winter and summer solstices) generally held in villages to celebrate the local goddess with a possible buffalo sacrifice to her, and the autumnal Durgāpūjā ending with Vijayādaśamī, which passes almost unnoticed in villages with the exception of the tenth day, but which was in the past probably limited to royal capitals.[8] This latter expression is obviously to be taken very relatively in its Indian sense, since a local principality could at a given time have been able to exhibit a truly royal style, while controlling only a very limited territory. But there is a real rupture in level between the royal cult of the Goddess and the village cult.

Why is this so, and in what way? The goddess celebrated during the Durgāpūjā in a royal capital (Jaipur, Maisūr, Rāmanāthapuram, etc., are those we have been able to observe) is never considered as the protectress of the *kingdom,* that is, of the territory populated by the king's subjects, but as the tutelary deity of the *royal lineage.* Her sanctuary is located within the palace—which is itself situated in the center of the capital—and accessible only to the royal family and its chaplain, except precisely for the day of Vijayādaśamī. In this context, the protective goddess of the royal lineage (who

[8]This formulation would no doubt have to be modified for Bengal, where the two festivals are both important, although one cannot easily isolate a royal level for the Durgāpūjā. It is the place of the Goddess in śākta Bengal that one would then have to reconsider, but that has no bearing on the present study.

can also have a small shrine on the city limit) has a double in the śamī tree that the king worships on the northern confines of the city before crossing the limit. But the space thus structured is increasingly symbolic, since the boundary to be crossed under arms is that of the kingdom rather than the capital. On the other hand, although the entire population would be jubilant (notably around the one or more sanctuaries of the *local* goddesses), the festival inside the palace sanctuary remains a matter for the royal line. For Vijayādaśamī, the king receives the homage of his vassals and high dignitaries, but he performs the śamīpūjā alone with his chaplain. The goddess is thus linked first and foremost with the dynasty rather than the kingdom, even if the kingdom is inseparable from the notion of the royal lineage (the queen or principal wife of the king being the figure of the prosperous kingdom), and the lineage is one that can be called into question at any time.

There is, however, no contradiction between the two levels of the Goddess's worship, though it is not possible to say that the village headman, sovereign on the village scale, presides over the local festival with the goddess as his tutelary divinity. One must leave to the king his Hindu specificity—which in particular obliges us to reject the notion of a "secularization" of kingship in India. The king as protector on earth of the universal Order, dharma, is ipso facto he who administers the world of transmigration. The latter can, in effect, only subsist within this Order. It is thus always through the fact that she presides over transmigration that the Goddess receives his worship. She is obviously made goddess because the cosmic Order would not exist if saṃsāra ceased to revolve around her center. Through the Goddess, the king is helped to surmount the vicissitudes of one or another precarious time in history to make of it a perfect cycle that adjusts itself to cycles of greater magnitude—that which leaves his place and supreme sovereignty all to the god of bhakti who "descends" upon his kingdom and gives shape to the universal Order and the salvation that he offers to individuals. But there is a unity of the kingdom only through the king's personal links with his vassals and the vassals of his vassals.

On the other hand, the villager is much more concretely linked to the village he lives in and the land he cultivates. Not only is his adherence to a kingdom mediate, but he is not sure of remaining subject to the same king or of living in the same kingdom for his whole life. One indeed finds here, in the cult of the local goddess as in the psychology of the villager, the ultimate echo of the kingdom's territorial instability, its inability to define the villager's identity because of political and military vicissitudes. On the contrary, the village is the permanent reference, and as such it would be strange indeed were it not to have a ritual existence—on its modest level of the humdrum routine of life. The Lady of the village is never a great lady, even if she alone has a deified post to guard her.

That does not, however, mean that the superior gods remain indifferent to the Goddess and her domain. Quite the contrary, it is through the Goddess that this local structure has been developed in which the order of the transmigratory world is the object of every care. Salvation would have no meaning if transmigration did not perdure. This is again a way of saying that bhakti englobes renunciation and transmigration reciprocally, as well as their respective values.

Were historical data to permit, it would be interesting to follow the diverse trajectories of Brahmans through the centuries. Not only is the data largely lacking, but the little one possesses does not allow one to establish concordances with the rest of Hindu society. Perhaps it is in one sense more instructive to observe that besides numerous Brahmans who came to terms with the Hinduism of the temples after having greatly contributed to its formation, there are several hundred Brahmans in south India who still today remain "orthodox" as regards Vedic practice, notably in establishing their fires as "master of the house" immediately after marriage. Being an *āhitāgni* (a master of the house "who has installed his fire") entails daily constraints and a totally settled way of life. Indeed, ways of transporting the fire have been foreseen in case of necessity. The texts themselves mention the cow dung patty that covers the incandescent embers. But the most spectacular accommodations to which Vedic orthodoxy had to yield relate to animal sacrifices. The solemn Vedic rites presupposed animal victims, and the āhitāgni must perform a certain number of solemn ceremonies connected with the calendar. In reducing them to a minimum—economy, or the contagion of ambient vegetarianism?—one goat should be sacrificed every six months, or in the most extreme circumstances, once a year (for an *agniṣṭoma*). But which orthodoxy is to be followed: that of the Vedic Brahman such as one imagines him two or three thousand years ago, or that of the "orthodox" Brahman who is pious and faithful to his obligations, but who, like so many others, has submitted to the ascendancy of the vegetarian renouncer? There must have been heated debates among Brahmans, and no doubt much wavering of conscience. The result is that today āhitāgnis seldom follow their logic to its end; they have a goat sacrificed every year, which does not prevent them from being otherwise vegetarian. Most of them, however, have once again had recourse to a substitute for this animal victim: near the yūpa they offer small packets of cooked rice wrapped in banana leaves . . . duly attached to the post by a cord of darbha grass! One does everything possible to give the rice packets the shape of an animal's body (plate 108).[9] In his description of the buffalo sacrifice, Herrenschmidt (1981, 161) signals that the pole of margosa wood that accompanies the buffalo (in which one must recognize the mobile form of Pōtu Rāju, carried by a Māla, no doubt "possessed") is attached to the animal by means of a bond (of grass no doubt, and why not of darbha?). Here it is the post that is the object of a substitution, but the cord is still there, one of the elements of the Vedic ritual that has traversed the centuries, beside the "Vedic" Brahman and within the popular cult of the local goddess, just like the post. This cord has gone through several transformations which, at least as much as those of the post, could not be passed over in silence, since both the cord and the post confirm the same continuity at either end of the society. It is not at all certain, despite all this, that things will long remain the same. It was all the more valuable to gather what could be the elements of a socioreligious structure of many centuries while bringing out their profound congruence.

[9]The oral information and photo are from Frits Staal, professor at the University of California, Berkeley, whom I heartily thank.

Appendix:

Maps of Sites Visited

Map 1. Sites visited in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Goa

	VILLAGE	TALUK	DISTRICT
		ORISSA	
3	Banki	Cuttack	Cuttack
7	Banpur	Khurda	Puri
4	Bhubaneswar	Bhubaneswar	Puri
1	Jajpur	Jajpur	Cuttack
8	Parlakimidi	Parlakimidi	Ganjam
5	Puri	Puri	Puri
2	Simulyapasi	Kamakhyanagar	Dhenkanal
6	Taradei Pitho	Busandapur	Puri
		ANDHRA PRADESH	
14	Agirpalli	Nuzividu	Krishna
19	Alampur	Alampur	Mahaboobnagar
20	Badvel	Badvel	Cuddapah
21	Bosedupalli	Cuddapah	Cuddapah
12	Chilakalapudi	Bandar	Krishna
9	Makharajola	Sompeta	Srikakulam
24	Mallavaram	Chandragiri	Chittoor
11	Mandapaka	Tanuku	West Godavari
17	Mangalagiri	Guntur	Guntur
23	Mannuru	Rajampet	Cuddapah
15	Nunna	Gannavaram	Krishna
18	Satuluru	Narasaraopet	Guntur
22	Siddhavattam	Siddhavatam	Cuddapah
10	Uppalapedu	Tadepalligudem	West Godavari
13	Uyyuru	Gannavaram	Krishna
16	Vijayawada	Vijayawada	Krishna

Map 2. Sites visited in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh

	VILLAGE	TALUK	DISTRICT
		TAMILNADU - PONDICHERRY	
18	Ambakarattur	Tirunallar Commune	Pondicherry State
24	Cennimalai	Perundurai	Periyar
43	Ceranmahadevi	Ambasamudram	Tirunelveli
26	Civanmalai	Dharapuram	Periyar
44	Corimuttu	Ambasamudram	Tirunelveli
27	Dharapuram	Dharapuram	Periyar
9	Elumedu	Panrutti	South Arcot
1	Erumaivettipalayam	Ponneri	Chingleput
40	Gangaikondan	Tirunelveli	Tirunelveli
37	Idampadal	Mudukulattur	Ramnad
38	Kadugucandaiccattiram	Mudukulattur	Ramnad
4	Kanchipuram	Kanchipuram	Chingleput
10	Kanniyakoil	Cuddalore	South Arcot
49	Kanyakumari	Kanyakumari	Kanyakumari
28	Karatojuvur	Udumalpet	Coimbatore
29	Karattur	Udumalpet	Coimbatore
14	Kattiruppu	Sirkali	Tanjavur
17	Kshetrapalapuram	Mayuram	Tanjavur
11	Kudikkadu	Cuddalore	South Arcot
8	Kunicampattu	Manadipattu Commune	Pondicherry State
3	Kuttampakkam	Vaniyampati	North Arcot
33	Landaikarunkulam	Ramnad	Ramnad
32	Madurai	Madurai	Madurai
12	Maduvettimangalam	Vriddhachalam	South Arcot
6	Malaiyanur	Tindivanam	South Arcot
16	Mayuram	Mayuram	Tanjavur
36	Melaperunkarai	Ramnad	Ramnad
46	Melceval	Ambasamudram	Tirunelveli
19	Nagapattinam	Nagapattinam	Tanjavur
39	Narippaiyur	Mudukulattur	Ramnad
30	Palani	Palani	Madurai
42	Palayamkottai	Tirunelveli	Tirunelveli
47	Paranceri	Ambasamudram	Tirunelveli
13	Puttur	Sirkali	Tanjavur
34	Ramanathapuram	Ramnad	Ramnad
35	Rameshvaram	Ramnad	Ramnad
22	Samayapuram	Lalkudi	Tiruchirapalli
23	Srirangam	Tiruchirapalli	Tiruchirapalli
41	Tachchanallur	Tirunelveli	Tirunelveli
31	Tanichcheyam	Nilakkottai	Madurai
48	Tiruchendur	Tiruchendur	Tirunelveli
15	Tirunandiyur	Mayuram	Tanjavur
20	Tiruvalanchuli	Kumbhakonam	Tanjavur
7	Tiruvannamalai	Tiruvannamalai	North Arcot
25	Tottampatti	Perundurai	Periyar
5	Uttaramerur	Kanchipuram	Chingleput
21	Valattur	Papanasam	Tanjavur
2	Walajapet	Walajapet	North Arcot

Map 3. Sites visited in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry

Glossary

abhiṣeka	Anointment and ritual bathing of a statue under worship with water, milk, clarified butter, etc.
adhvaryu	One of the four main officiating priests of a solemn Vedic sacrifice. He is the one who is responsible for most of the movements and manipulations on the sacrificial space.
agnicayana	Vedic ritual involving the construction of an elaborate bird-shaped fire altar out of layers of baked brick.
agniṣṭoma	Annual sacrifice of Soma during the spring season, as an obligation preliminary to all the other soma sacrifices during the year.
āhavanīya	One of the three main fires of the solemn Vedic sacrifice, into which are made offerings of clarified butter and of fat from animal victims. It is doubled during the ritual.
āhitāgni	The Brahman who has set up his sacrificial fire at the time of his marriage and who practices the Vedic rites related to this fire.
ājña-mālā	Garland given as an order for celebrating certain festivals.
alaku	Long needles driven under the skin as an ascetic mortification during goddess festivals. The word refers mainly to the sharpened point-like weapon aimed at piercing the body.
aṅkurārpaṇa	Ritual of sowing grains, theoretically of nine kinds (thus *navadhānya*, "nine grains") in one or several pots for sprouting at the time of a temple festival or a domestic ceremony.
ārati	Offering of light to a god in igniting a bit of camphor on a plate.

ardhamaṇḍapa — Passage, in some temples, between the sanctum sanctorum and the maṇḍapa where devotees gather. See *maṇḍapa*.

arivāḷ — A kind of billhook used for the beheading of animal victims, especially goats.

arrack — In south India, a kind of alcohol made out of the fermented sap of sundry palms.

astra — Weapon that symbolizes a given god and takes the latter's place during some ceremonies, such as ablution rites.

asura — The opposite of a deva or heavenly god, normally residing in the infernal regions.

aśvamedha — Horse sacrifice, one of the main royal sacrifices of Vedic India.

āyudhapūjā — A Vijayādaśamī subrite, the "worship of weapons," typically those of a king.

bagāḍ — Marāṭhī name for the hook-swinging post. See *hook-swinging*.

balijana — Men who submit themselves to ritual "tortures" as hereditary victims offered to the Goddess.

balipīṭha — Pedestal at the entrance of the first enclosure of a temple and on the axis of the shrine. On its top, which is flat, offerings of flowers and food are deposited in order to keep away evil beings coming from outside.

bannimaṇḍapa — In Mysore, the hall for the śamī tree (Kannada *banni*).

bhakti — Devotion to a god or goddess that implies offerings at home and in temples as well as ascetic practices.

brahmacārin — The child from higher castes of ancient and traditional India living with his preceptor for the study of Veda. This stage of life, which ends with the young man coming back home and marrying, is considered very ascetic and pure. At an older age, a *brahmacārin* may also be a "renouncer" who has never married. Unusual in the second sense are *brahmacāriṇī* women. However, the virgin goddess is the exemplary *brahmacāriṇī*.

brahmotsava — Main festival in the temple of a high bhakti deity.

cāmiyāḍi — Tamil for the possessed man who "dances the god."

caṣāla — Faceted ring slipped on the final tenon of the Vedic sacrificial post.

cāturmāsya — The year is theoretically divided into three periods of four months each, or *cāturmāsyas*. In fact, mainly the summer monsoon is referred to as cāturmāsya.

ceḍil — (Tamil *ceṭil*, Telugu *ciḍi*) A kind of mobile gallows at the top of which devotees, suspended by hooks inserted beneath the skin of their backs, turn in the air. There are many variations. See *hook-swinging*.

cekkumāndaḍi — (Tamil *cekkumāntaṭi* or *cukkumāntaṭi*) Symbolic weapon of lower deities in south India. It looks like a bludgeon with a swollen end.

cēri — Hamlet, separated from the village settlement, where "Untouchables" live in Tamilnadu.

cilambu — See *silambu*.

dakṣiṇa — One of the three sacrificial fires in the sacrificer's shed, located on the south side. It is shaped like a half-moon or a winnowing basket.

dakṣiṇā — An honorary gift or payment to a priest upon conclusion of a ritual.

ḍamaru — (Sanskrit *ḍamaru,* Tamil *uṭukkai*) Hourglass-shaped drum. It is particularly Śiva Naṭarāja's attribute.

darbha — Very long and sharp pointed grass used in various rites and for braiding and tying. Various botanical identifications (identified usually as *kuśa*).

dharmakartā — Sanskrit word of recent origin designating the trustee of a temple, who is usually a representative of the local landlord caste.

dhvajastambha — Post bearing the temple flag during a festival. It is temporarily or permanently erected in the first enclosure of the temple, in front of the deity of the sanctuary.

dikpāla — Guardian god of one of the cardinal points. There are four or eight.

dīkṣā — Consecration ritual of the sacrificer in order to enable him to celebrate a Vedic solemn sacrifice.

dīpārādhanā — Offering of a burning flame to a god.

dunna-pōtu	In Telugu, plough-buffalo. It is also the buffalo offered as animal victim.
dvārapāla	Guardian of the door. There is usually one on each side of the door of a temple sanctuary.
firewalking	See *tīmidi*.
gajapati	"Lord of elephants." Title of the Gaṅga kings of Orissa.
garbhagṛha	"Embryo's home." Sanctuary that shelters the main god of a temple.
gārhapatya	"Fire of the householder," one of the three main fires of the solemn Vedic sacrifice in the shed of the sacrificer. It has been brought from the sacrificer's household and is used to light the other fires.
ghī	Clarified butter or ghee, which the adhvaryu offers into the āhavanīya fire.
grāmadevatā	In Āndhra, the grāmadevatā is the goddess who protects the village at the settlement's border. In Tamilnadu, the local gods together constitute the grāmadevatās.
grāma-śānti	Propitiatory ritual at the beginning of a brahmotsava in order to secure a safe unfolding of the festival.
gurukkaḷ	Officiating Brahman priest at a Śaiva temple, and by extension at goddess temples where they often replace lower-caste priests.
homa	Oblation (mainly of clarified butter) in the Vedic āhavanīya fire or in any other fire for oblations.
hook-swinging	English name for the ascetic and sacrificial practice that consists of suspending the body from the mobile gallows of a post by hooks inserted beneath the skin.
hotar	One of the four main officiants of solemn Vedic rituals. He pronounces the formulas accompanying the rites.
iḍā	Part of offered substance that the participants in a sacrifice consume in common.
iṣṭadevatā	One's chosen deity (as distinct from a *kuladevatā*, lineage god).
jātra	(Telugu < Sanskrit *yātrā*) Pilgrimage in general; derivatively, the festival of a grāmadevatā in Āndhra.

jātrapeddaḷu	(Telugu) Leading villagers during a goddess festival in Āndhra.
jyotistambha	Post on top of which a pot with fire is placed during Kārttikai festival.
kalaśa	Water pot made of metal or baked clay, typically filled to represent the goddess during a festival. It may also stand for other deities and its water is sometimes used for ritual aspersions.
kaḷḷu	In Tamilnadu, fermented sap from palm trees; toddy.
kāma	Love in general, desire for any real or abstract object.
kambhadeva	"God of the post" or, better, "post god."
kaṅkaṇa	Yellow protective thread, colored with turmeric, tied to the wrist of deities and men who are involved in festival rites. Can also be called *kāppu* (from the Tamil root *kā,* to "protect").
kapāla	Skull, supposed to be that of the fifth head of Brahmā, which is the begging bowl of Śiva, Bhairava, and some forms of the Goddess.
kāppu	(Tamil) See *kaṅkaṇa*.
karagam	(Tamil *karakam*) Large decorated pot representing the Goddess during her festival. There are many variants.
karpura	"Camphor." The karpurārati is the offering of an ignited piece of camphor to a deity. See *ārati*.
katti	Knife or kind of dagger that can be used for immolating animal victims. It is also a symbolic weapon in iconography.
kāvaṭi	1. Pole put on the shoulder to carry burdens on each side. 2. Arched pole on the shoulder carried as offering and decorated with peacock feathers for Subrahmaṇya-Murugaṉ.
kirīṭa	Royal diadem.
koḍai	(Tamil *koṭai*) In Tirunelveli, yearly three-day festival for a goddess or a nonvegetarian lower god.
kōlam	Figure drawn daily by women with rice flour, in principle with a continuous line on the floor in front of the house door. On festival days, kōlam are drawn more elaborately.

kolupu(-ḷu) (Telugu) The kolupu—or generally in plural, the kolupuḷu—is a festival not regularly celebrated for grāmadevatās. It is offered when an important opportunity arises, and its climax is the buffalo sacrifice.

kṣetrapāla Deity who protects the "territory" and the sovereignty of the presiding god of a temple. He has a warrior function.

kuladevatā Tutelary lineage god, other terms for which are *kuladevam* and *kuladevī*.

kumbha (Sanskrit; Tamil *kumpam*). Pot. See *kalaśa*.

kumbhābhiṣeka Literally, "aspersion with (the water of) a pot." It is the solemn ceremony of reconsecration that follows a temple renovation.

liṅga Aniconic form of Śiva under worship. Phallus emerging from female organ in the sanctuary conceived as a womb. See *garbhagṛha*.

mahā-vedi Trapezoidal part of the sacrificial space between the sacrificer's shed (on the west) and the sacrificial post erected astride the eastern limit. It includes in particular the square *uttara-vedi*. See *uttara-vedi*.

Mahiṣāsura The buffalo "demon," opponent of the Goddess in classical Hinduism. His iconography appears (first to second centuries AD according to the current state of documentation) as probably already related to a practice of buffalo sacrifice.

Mahiṣamardinī Also Mahiṣāsuramardinī, (the Goddess as) slayer of the buffalo "demon," specifically celebrated in the *Devīmāhātmya* but also known perhaps earlier in the *Mahābhārata*.

mahiṣī 1. She-buffalo. 2. Chief wife of a king (the "mighty" one).

mandai In Tamil, an elevated platform surrounding the bottom of a tree in the center of a village. Villagers meet there for discussion.

maṇḍapa Hall in front of a temple's sanctuary; place where devotees stand facing the deity.

mañcalnīr Turmeric water that is sprinkled, as a blessing, on the processional route of a deity on the last of his or her festival days. Also the name given to this ritual.

māviḷakku Lamp made of flour whose offering (reserved to women) is often made at temple festivals.

mūlavar — A deity's principal immobile statue in a temple's sanctuary. It is usually made of stone.

muni — (Tamil *muṉi*) Theoretically, an ascetic Brahman who is under a vow to remain silent. He can be a quite dangerous person when disturbed.

mūrti — An image for worship; the form of a deity in a temple (Tamil *mūlavar*) as well as the form taken out on processions (see *utsavamūrti*).

naivedya — Offering of cooked food to the presiding deity of a temple and to his attendants.

navadhānya — See *aṅkurārpaṇa*.

nirmālya-devatā — Name given to Caṇḍeśvara, Śiva's assistant in charge of "consuming" the food offered to Śiva, which is supposed to be too impure for his devotees.

pāduka — Footprints, or wooden clogs of a god, to which devotees render homage.

pāligai — (Tamil *pālikai* < Sanskrit *pālikā*) "Protectress." Small earthen pots, wide at the top and contracted in the middle, in which nine kinds of seeds are sown on a base of leaves and earth to let them germinate in darkness for ten days. This rite enters into diverse domestic and public rituals. See *aṅkurārpaṇa*.

pambai — (Tamil *pampai*) Double drum whose two sides are struck by sticks, one of which is curved.

pañcāmṛta — A kind of nectarlike food composed of five ingredients: milk, curd, clarified butter, honey, and sugar.

parivara-devatā — Attendant deities surrounding the sanctuary of a main god, but within the precincts of a temple.

pēy — (Tamil < Sanskrit *preta*) "Spirit of one who is dead," in south India a "demon," sometimes worshipped as a lower carnivorous divinity.

poṅgal — (Tamil *poṅkal*) 1. Winter solstice festival celebrated in mid-January in south India. 2. Rice ritually cooked at a temple during a festival, a part of which is offered to the temple god.

poṭṭu — Red or black dot marked on a woman's forehead between the eyebrows. It indicates that a woman is married.

pradakṣiṇā	Clockwise circumambulation of a sanctuary.
prasāda, prasād	Part of the offerings to a deity given back to a devotee, indicating a god's favor.
prāśitra	In Vedic sacrifice, the first part of the offerings that must be eaten by the priest called the brahman. It symbolizes the mortal wound of the victim (but it is only a bit of cooked cereals).
pūcāri	(Tamil) Non-Brahman priest in charge of a temple ritual. He is the one who does the pūjā (< *pūcai-ācāri*).
pūjā	(Sanskrit; Tamil *pūcai*) More or less elaborated worship rendered to deities.
pūṅkaragam	(Tamil *pūṅkarakam*) A wicker framework that is decorated with flower garlands and within which a processional goddess statue is tied and thus carried on the head of some devotees.
pūntēr	"Flower ratha." Miniature chariot with a flower decoration, in which a small statue of Paccai Amman is placed; it is carried on the head of the priest who goes around inviting devotees to attend the festival.
puṇyavācana	Auspicious formulas for purifying the space where the festival is to begin.
puruṣa	"Man," "male." It means, 1. the cosmic man whose self-sacrifice created the world; 2. any man and specifically the sacrificer who offers a Vedic sacrifice or any of its Hindu substitutes; 3. what is immortal in a human being, able either to be born again or to gain release from rebirths.
rakṣas, rākṣasa	Demoniac and cannibal being, but with a function within the world order, as well as one "who protects" and of whom one "has to beware."
ratha	(Sanskrit war chariot) In south India, a huge and heavy wooden sculpted chariot with thick wooden wheels, drawn with the help of tow ropes by devotees during the main annual festival of a temple. It conveys warrior and cosmic symbolism.
rathavīthi	A quadrilateral processional route for a temple chariot during a festival, signifying the deity's royalty and sovereignty over the four directions.

sabhā	Audience hall of a king surrounded by his court.
sacrificer	See *yajamāna*.
śakti	Female aspect of the divine through whom the world is manifested. In Āndhra, the śakti is opposed to the grāmadevatā as the dangerous goddess coming from outside.
śakti-kolupu	See *kolupu*(*-ḷu*). The śakti-kolupu is a part of the kolupuḷu intended, through blood offerings, to get rid of the śaktis who come from elsewhere.
samādhi	Tomb or stela erected in memory of a venerated dead person. It can also be a liṅga temple with the same meaning and purpose.
saṃhitā	Collections of Vedic poems and of texts in prose mixed with quotations often coming from the poems of the *Ṛgveda,* which give the most ancient form known of the Vedic ritual.
samidh	Small wooden sticks used as fuel for the sacrificial fire.
śāmitra	Fire located outside the sacrificial area (to the northeast) on which is boiled the flesh of the animal victims killed by the executioner (*śamitar*).
saṃsāra	"Whirlpool" of rebirths, cyclic world of transmigration.
silambu	(Tamil *cilampu*) Oblong and hollow metal ring, which has small pebbles inside that rattle when the ring is shaken.
śmaśāna	Cremation ground.
soma	Ritual plant with mythic overtones represented since the Vedic period by substitutes. It constitutes the victim of a solemn sacrifice during which it is pressed out, its juice strained and finally drunk by the Brahman priests. The victim-plant is of royal status and doubtlessly symbolizes King Soma, who gives his name to the Lunar dynasty (where *soma* takes on the meaning "Moon").
śrīvatsa	"Śrī's beloved." Symbol inscribed on Viṣṇu's chest, it is iconographically represented as a kind of cross-shaped volute.
sthalapurāṇa	"Purāṇa of a place," a text telling the story of a temple deity's importance in the locale of the temple.

sthalavṛkṣa	Typically in each temple, a particular tree associated with the main god.
śūla	A kind of spear, an attribute of Śiva. See *triśūla* and *vēl*.
śūlakkal	Stone with a sculpted trident, as with Śiva's trident.
svadharma	Personal duties with regard to one's caste and life stage.
svaru	Wooden chip of the tree trunk from which the Vedic sacrificial post is carved. It is used as a mobile substitute for the post.
tāli	Pendant worn as a neck ornament tied by the bridegroom around the bride's neck at marriage, and thus a sign of a married woman.
tappaṭṭai	Flat drum on a wooden frame beaten with two small sticks.
teppakkuḷam	Tank of water, often with a central stone kiosk, attached to a temple and in which the deity is floated on a raft at the end of a festival.
tēr	(Tamil) See *ratha*.
terukkūttu	Nightly street theater sometimes played during a goddess's festival.
tīmidi	(Tamil *tīmiti*) Firewalking on a rectangular carpet of glowing embers at the end of many goddess festivals—a rite executed by persons following individual vows, except for the priest who leads the way in carrying on his head the pot that represents the goddess.
tīrtha	Literally, a "ford," where one can "wade across" a stream. The word refers to any pilgrimage place located on a river, tank, or by extension consecrated water.
tirukalyāṇam	"Sacred marriage," as of deities at a temple or festival.
tiruviḷā	(Tamil) Festival of a local deity.
triśūla	Trident, Śiva's weapon, his *astra*.
utkara	Mound made of the debris from digging out the mahā-vedi, where the remains coming from things handled ritually during a Vedic solemn sacrifice are thrown.
utsavamūrti	Processional form of a deity, usually made of bronze but also often of wood.

uttara-vedi — Elevated square altar, located in the eastern part of the *mahā-vedi* and near the sacrificial post, with a fire for offerings related to animal sacrifice in its middle.

vāhana — "Vehicle" in painted wood, often shaped like an animal, for carrying the processional deity.

vapā — Epiploon, omentum, or caul—transparent and fatty membrane covering the intestines of an animal victim.

varṇa — The four social categories: Brāhmaṇa or Brahman, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. Members of the latter lack the entitlement to know the Veda or to practice Vedic rituals.

vāstupuruṣa — Symbolic form of man on which a temple is built.

vāstuśānti — Propitiation ritual of the place (temple, habitat) at the beginning of a temple festival or before inhabiting a house.

vedi — Vedic altar in general. Specifically, a trapezoidal altar with both long sides curved inward and with elongated corners. It is located in the sacrificer's shed in the middle of the three main sacrificial fires.

vēl — A kind of spear with a spatulate head. Weapon of Subrahmaṇya-Murugaṉ.

vibhūti — Ashes from cow dung offered to devotees as a sign of a god's favor. Rubbed on the forehead.

virāṉ — (Tamil < Sanskrit *vīra*) Warrior and nonvegetarian lower deities, often subordinated to a higher deity. They constitute a divine category in south India.

yajamāna — Man who offers a Vedic sacrifice for the benefit of himself and his family but has it performed by Brahman priests. The "sacrificer" par excellence is the king.

yoni — "Female organ" around Śiva's liṅga.

yūpa — "Post" of the Vedic sacrifice, considered a replica of the sacrificer, to which the victim offered as the latter's substitute is tied for a while.

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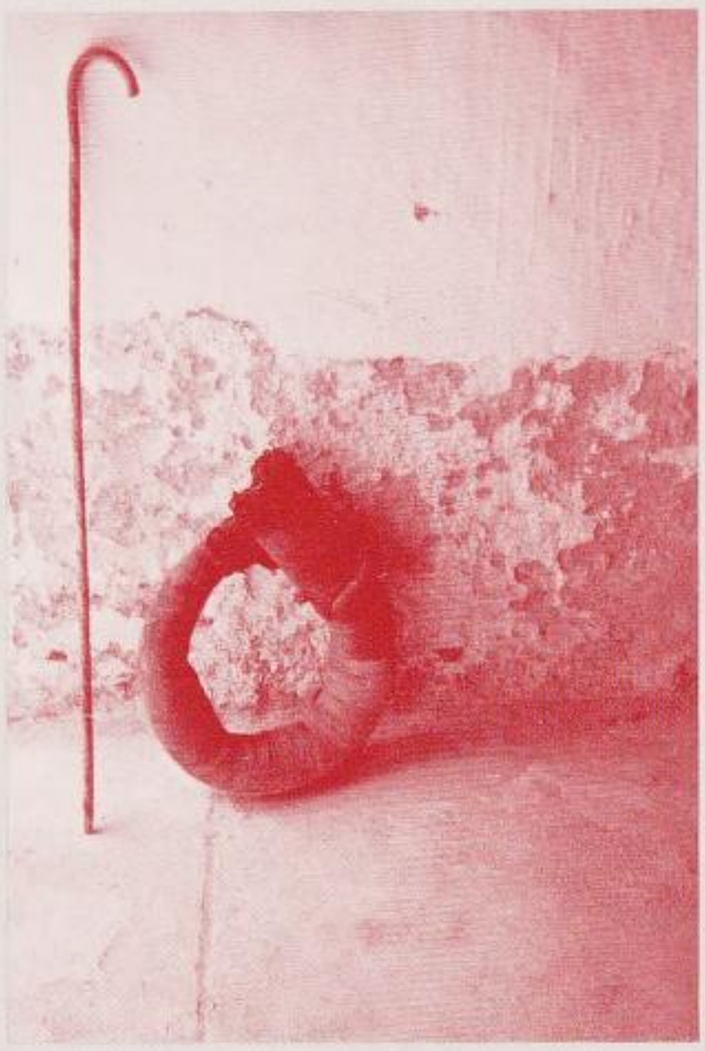

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